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Official Records

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New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Campbell (Ireland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 37 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/52/467, A/52/581)

Draft resolutions (A/52/L.54, L.55, L.62)

Amendments (A/52/L.63)

Mr. Abou-Hadid (Syrian Arab Republic) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Despite the many crises and problems in the international arena today, some of which have taken a dangerous turn towards escalation, the issue of peace and stability in the Middle East remains high on the list of international concerns. This most urgent question has preoccupied the international community for 50 years now, forcing it to redouble its efforts to find ways and means to lead the peace process to success and to eliminate the many Israeli obstacles that have halted it. Naturally, such international concern did not arise by chance or in a vacuum. It was dictated by many political considerations, foremost among which is the need to contain the explosive situation created by the extremist approach taken by the current Government of Netanyahu, particularly after it became clear that if that Government were to continue on its current path the result would be more frustration, violence and chaos in the Middle East. That, in turn, would have grave repercussions and ripple effects, threatening the interests of many States and peoples and endangering the security and stability of the region and the world, with unforeseeable results.

It is with good reason that the question most insistently repeated in this Assembly these days has been that of who is responsible for the tragedies, for the scourge that is currently afflicting the Middle East. What is the reason for the almost irreversible deterioration and near collapse of the situation? Naturally, such a question cannot be separated from another one related to the peace process: the question of where that process is today.

No one can claim that the process is still alive, that it has any pulse whatsoever to indicate that it is indeed moving towards the established objective of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. Taking a few steps backward, one would find that this process, now halted by the Netanyahu Government, was, only six years ago, a source of hope for the peoples of the region and for all those who love and cherish peace in the world.

The peace process launched in Madrid in 1991 was based on the clear criteria of, first and foremost, the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the principle of land for peace. No one imagined that a just and comprehensive peace could be achieved free of cost or without difficulties. For that reason, the Arab leaders, at

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the Cairo Summit, made peace a strategic choice. However, that peace is now dying at the hands of the intransigent Government of Israel.

Everyone knows that the peace talks on the Syrian track continued for five years and then reached the point at which Israel made a commitment to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967. The Netanyahu Government turned its back on that commitment, denying it just as it had denied all the undertakings and commitments it had entered into during the peace process. What Netanyahu wanted was to shirk any and all prices to be paid by Israel for peace. He sang a new tune, calling for new talks based on no agreed framework or basis, including those established in Madrid. He does not want to recognize the existence of occupied Arab land which must be returned to its original owners, and indeed he has now begun to urge the holding of what he calls talks without preconditions.

In his opinion, such preconditions are represented by the Arab countries' insistence on the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Madrid terms of reference. What Netanyahu proposes is rejected in its entirety not only by the Arabs but indeed by anyone who respects the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law. Is insisting on the principles of international law and the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions a precondition?

The fundamental problem in our region, and what that region experiences every day in terms of tension, complications and turbulence, as well as the region's potential for conflagration and grave repercussions, is the problem of continued occupation by Israel of Arab land, the usurpation of the rights of Arabs and the practice of injustice and oppression, as well as Israel's planned regional expansion and hegemony and its refusal to recognize the principles of international legitimacy, foremost among which are the principles of international law and of the United Nations Charter regarding the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the land of others by force or aggression.

A brief examination of the proposals of the current leader of the Israeli Government shows that they run counter to all the principles of international legitimacy. In brief, what the Israeli Government wants is to bargain with the Arabs on something it does not own, something to which it has no right and something that it has no basis to claim under the conventions and principles of international legitimacy.

It is truly strange that there is no appropriate or adequate response to the challenges of Netanyahu and his attempts to undermine the efforts by the United States of America, which provided the peace initiative well-known and internationally agreed foundations. We now see him shirking his commitments to those foundations and ignoring the provisions of the United Nations Charter, the principles of international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy. We can honestly say that we find no justification for the international community to remain unconcerned over the non-implementation of the very principles and foundations on which the peace process was built, which were supported by the entire international community.

We believe that there is no middle ground between good and evil, between those who respect and those who do not respect legality. The Arabs are not calling on the American sponsor to take their side. But they call on the American Administration to stand by the foundations they laid, which were agreed upon and regarding which assurances were provided to the parties to the peace process. The Arabs call upon the sponsors of the peace process, and specifically the American sponsor, to stand by the basis from which it was launched. We believe that without influence being brought to bear on the party responsible for the halt in the peace process and its deterioration, namely, the current Israeli Administration, the peace process cannot continue and cannot achieve the results we all seek.

No one can lay the blame or responsibility on the Arab sides which accepted the peace process, cooperated in it and went to Madrid to propel it. As for Syria, it is prepared at any time to resume the talks from the point where they were halted. However, no one can acquit the Netanyahu Government of its responsibility for all the upheavals in the region today. Nor can one forget the hopeful picture of the peace process before Netanyahu, compared to the current situation which is full of tension and the dangers of conflagration which exist at every moment. It has become important to craft a united, international position, a position of pressure that does not stop merely at the transmission of letters and the giving of advice. All available means of pressuring Israel must be brought to bear to compel it to respect the will for peace. The Israeli Government must be forced to put an end to its reckless policy that is threatening the region at all times with more war, more bloodshed and the possible loss of the chance for peace which is available now. Consequently, it will be difficult for the region to witness a state of peace or stability.

Despite all that, Syria welcomes international efforts and wishes to do whatever it can to restore credibility to the peace process and to open the door to the establishment of pillars for a just and comprehensive solution that gives everyone their due. Syria truly, genuinely wishes peace. It has repeatedly declared that peace is its strategic objective. However, it must be clear that Syria will not accept any bargaining on rights or on concession of any territory. When Syria calls for the resumption of talks from the point where they were stopped, and on the basis of a clear Israeli commitment to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, it will do so because it wants a stable and solid peace that puts an end to injustice and occupation and ensures for the region a life of security and stability far removed from the atmosphere of threats and aggression.

Mr. Bhatti (Pakistan): Six years ago, in October 1991, the international community breathed a sigh of relief when a Peace Conference on the Middle East was convened in Madrid. A ray of hope and optimism filled the imagination of people around the world as prospects for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict looked brighter. It was a welcome development, as peace in the Middle East seemed an achievable goal after a protracted bloody conflict in the region. We watched this process with deep interest and hope. The international community as a whole backed the peace process and impressed upon the parties the need to seek a peaceful and durable solution to the problem on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which envisaged the formula of land for peace in the Middle East.

Unfortunately, the initial euphoria soon gave way to uncertainty and gloom. The whole process suffered a serious setback because Israel, the occupying Power, declined to accept the principle of land for peace as a basis for a comprehensive solution to the problem. In flagrant violation of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, Israel also declined to withdraw from the Syrian Golan, which both legally and historically belongs to the Syrian Arab Republic. It also continued to encourage construction of new settlements in the occupied territories. These deplorable practices and policies of Israel disappointed the entire international community. This Israeli intransigence led to the breakdown of the peace process and dialogue on all tracks, particularly on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

Pakistan deplores Israel's intransigence and its refusal to comply with all the Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. We firmly believe that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) provide the only viable and just framework for a durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. There should be strict adherence to the principles laid down in these resolutions, which provide the legal basis for building a durable peace in the region. Within the occupied territories, Israel must abide by the principles laid down in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of non-combatants in times of war.

It would be unfortunate if, at this fateful juncture in history, the Middle East were allowed relapse into a fresh, vicious cycle of violence and chaos. This would pose a renewed threat to international peace and security. We must not allow this to happen. The international community must exert its influence on Israel to ensure that the peace process in the Middle East remains on track. Israel must take the necessary measures forthwith to create a propitious atmosphere for a continued dialogue in the Middle East. These measures should include withdrawal of its forces from occupied Syrian territories to the positions held before 4 June 1967; repealing all administrative measures aimed at annexing the Syrian Golan; revoking all laws and illegal jurisdiction imposed on the occupied Golan, which legally belongs to the Syrian Arab Republic, as stipulated in Security Council resolution 497 (1981); immediately stopping construction of new settlements in occupied territories; and respect for the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilian non-combatants.

We are convinced that these measures would facilitate the furthering of the peace process in the Middle East.

The Acting President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, may I appeal to representatives to ensure that there is a little less noise in the Hall so as to allow the speakers the dignity that they deserve.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): The situation in the Middle East, which is under discussion today by the General Assembly, is highly pertinent and requires the international community's most careful attention.

The continuing deadlock in the Arab-Israeli dialogue requires the sponsors of the Middle East peace process, including Russia, to take additional energetic and urgent measures to find ways of unblocking the situation as

rapidly as possible, since it threatens to unleash new violence and bloodshed in this region.

We are prepared to continue to work actively to that end. A significant contribution to the joint efforts aimed at bringing the Arabs and Israelis back to the negotiating table was made by the recent visit to the region by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Mr. Yevgeny Primakov. The code of peace and security in the Middle East proposed by the Russian Minister in Cairo, as contained in United Nations document A/52/570, is an important initiative aimed at strengthening the climate of trust in the region and at establishing a genuine and lasting peace.

The bases of the Russian approach are the fundamental elements of the peace process: the Madrid formula, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of land for peace.

Russia supports the speedy resumption of negotiations on all the Arab-Israeli tracks, without exception, in particular the achievement of real progress on the Palestinian-Israeli contacts on the basis of previously achieved agreements and accords. It is particularly important here that the interested parties refrain from any unilateral actions that could anticipate the results of the negotiations.

In this regard, we again call on Israel to cease building new settlements and to begin immediately and fully the practical implementation of the Palestinian-Israeli agreements. In so doing, Israel's security concerns must clearly be taken into account. Obviously, the agreements and accords that have been concluded between the parties to this complex process must be implemented. This of course refers to the provisions of the Interim Agreement and the Hebron Protocol of 15 January 1995 concerning redeployment in the West Bank. The implementation of these accords requires dialogue, goodwill and the support of the international community.

Moreover, there can be no lasting peace in the Middle East without movement on the Syrian-Israeli track, where the basis for further negotiations already exists, or without the achievement of progress on the Lebanese-Israeli settlement on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which is its indispensable international legal basis.

Finding a solution to the question of the Middle East is a shared task. To resolve it, various instruments, the best diplomatic skill and the leading political figures of the world are being deployed. In all this, a special role undoubtedly falls to the United Nations.

Russia, as a co-sponsor of the peace process in the Middle East, intends to continue to work actively to extricate the region from the present prolonged deadlock through a search for mutually acceptable solutions and compromises in the positions of the interested parties.

Ms. Wensley (Australia): It is a cause of deep regret that, even compared with last year, the achievement of peace in the Middle East remains elusive, that the parties are distanced by mistrust and lack of confidence and that the energetic efforts of many to take the process forward appear to be achieving little.

Australia shares the concern, frustration and disappointment of the international community that the people of the Middle East are still being denied the opportunity to live in peace, security and prosperity. The Australian Government's policy on the Middle East is based on long-standing and firmly established principles — a fundamental commitment to Israel's right to exist within secure and recognized boundaries and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination — acknowledging that the ultimate shape of the Palestinian entity, including the possibility of an independent State, is subject to the final status negotiations between the parties directly involved.

We support strongly those negotiations and the foundations on which they are based: Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace, the Madrid process and the Oslo Declaration of Principles concluded between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993. We consider that the attainment of a lasting peace requires a comprehensive agreement in which the rights of each of the parties is respected on an equitable basis.

We believe that there is a need for a renewed effort to engage Syria and Lebanon in the negotiating process on the basis of the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), the sovereignty of each of the parties, guarantees for Israel's security and an outcome regarding the Golan Heights which is acceptable to both sides.

We have all set out our policies on the situation in the Middle East more times than any of us cares to remember. My own direct experience goes back to the General Assembly sessions of 1974 and 1975. We have

assembled here and elsewhere year after year and have all said much the same thing. Some years we have been very pleased to be able to welcome progress made towards a resolution of the situation in the Middle East, but regrettably, this is not one of those years.

Since the important resolution of the situation in Hebron earlier this year, we have had no cause to register satisfaction with developments. As so many speakers have said here today, the negotiations have been at a standstill and even the recent formal resumption of the talks has not produced a glimmer of a substantive result. In addition, we have witnessed terrible acts of terrorism which have shocked the entire international community. Australia has joined the rest of the world in condemning those acts vehemently and unequivocally. We take the opportunity presented once again by today's debate to call on all those involved to work together to eradicate the entire infrastructure of terrorism so that these acts can never be repeated, anywhere.

At this fifty-second session of the General Assembly, we have supported efforts to contribute to this goal, including through the adoption in the Sixth Committee of the convention on terrorist bombings. My Government has also condemned, both publicly and also — and I think it is important to record — more often in direct talks in private, actions which we have considered to have set back the peace process. We have consistently urged both parties to remove and avoid any impediments in the path of the peace process. We repeat here that both parties must refrain from actions which undermine the trust and confidence that all of us know are the essential, vital ingredient for progress to be resumed in the negotiations.

It is in that context particularly that we regard settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories as unhelpful to the achievement of peace and that we urge the Israeli Government to put a stop to that activity now.

It is all very well to make speeches from this rostrum and to exhort others to take action. Here in the United Nations, we all do a lot of that. But Australians are practical people, and so we have worked to translate our strong support for the peace process into practical assistance, particularly in areas where we judge that we have special experience or expertise to offer. We have contributed over $14 million to the implementation of the Oslo process. An Australian non-governmental organization called Australian Legal Resources International, under the guidance of its Chairman, Mr. Marcus Einfeld, is working with the Palestinian Authority to promote the rule of law in the Palestinian territories. Next week, we are sponsoring and making available Australian experts to a workshop in Tiberias, under the auspices of the water-resources working group, to address the crucial issue of water resources in the region. I should also note that we regret that the working group on arms control and regional security, to which we have also contributed Australian expertise, is currently in abeyance.

Finally, we are also demonstrating that practical commitment to bringing about peace in the Middle East by our consistent and continuing contribution to the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai, the commander of which, I note, was until very recently an Australian.

The ongoing suffering of the Iraqi people, a subject of continuing concern to us, is attributable, in Australia's view, to the unwillingness of the Government of Iraq to cooperate with the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM). Completion of UNSCOM's mandate, without harassment or obstruction by Iraq, is an indispensable precondition for the lifting of sanctions. In the meantime, we have welcomed the implementation of Security Council resolutions 986 (1995) and 1111 (1997), which have gone some way towards providing basic necessities for the Iraqi people.

Iraq's recent decision to expel American UNSCOM inspectors was deplored by my Government as a direct and flagrant defiance of Security Council resolutions, of the rule of law and of the international community. Iraq should realize that the international community is unwavering in its insistence that UNSCOM must be allowed, unhindered, to find, to tag and to destroy Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

We urge Iraq to comply fully with the Security Council resolutions and to cooperate with UNSCOM and its Chairman, without conditions, without obstruction and without interference. It is only through this cooperation and compliance that Iraq will be in a position to receive certification, acceptable to the international community, that it is no longer building, testing, storing or hiding the worst kinds of weapons of mass destruction.

We welcome the Security Council's recent strong support for UNSCOM in its efforts fully to carry out its mandate without obstruction or threat.

My Government will continue to encourage all States of the region to work constructively towards the

objective of a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. The achievement of that objective, we believe, would provide a very important basis for the enhancement of regional security.

In addition, we urge all States in the region to ratify the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions. These weapons of mass destruction, which are increasingly the focus of public comment, interest and attention, pose one of the most serious threats to regional and to global security, and they must be countered.

Australia, also, has long held that universal membership of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) would constitute an important achievement both for global security and for security in regions of tension such as that which we are discussing today: the situation in the Middle East. We therefore welcome particularly the fact that the United Arab Emirates, Djibouti and Oman have all acceded recently to the Treaty, bringing us that much closer to the goal of universal membership of the NPT. We reiterate our appeal to Israel, as the only regional State yet to accede to the Treaty, to give the most serious consideration to the security benefits — not only for itself, but for the region — of acceding to the Treaty and of placing its nuclear facilities under international safeguards.

We call also on all other States of the Middle East which have not yet negotiated full-scope safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to proceed to do so without delay and, furthermore, to conclude protocols to their existing bilateral safeguards agreements which are based on the IAEA's new Model Additional Protocol for strengthened nuclear safeguards.

We are pleased that the most recently concluded arms control instrument, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, has been signed by a significant number of Middle East States and, indeed, ratified by one. We encourage all other regional States to follow suit.

Australia also urges Middle East States to contribute to the search for a lasting and comprehensive solution to the humanitarian and economic crisis brought about by anti-personnel landmines. For those who are not yet in a position to sign the Ottawa landmines-ban treaty, we urge a cooperative approach to addressing this issue in the 1998 session of the Conference on Disarmament.

Australia considers that the United Nations does have an important role to play in contributing to the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. However, Australia does not consider that the meetings of the emergency special session this year have actually been particularly helpful in taking the peace process forward. I reiterate that we understand and appreciate the sense of frustration which has given rise to these meetings, and we have made clear on every possible occasion that we support the principles on which the resolutions are based. But we hope that the emergency special session will not need to be resumed. If that is to happen, we need clear, urgent and tangible results from the direct negotiations. Everyone involved needs to believe that the process is delivering to them, or is going to deliver to them, dividends from the negotiations. So we again urge the parties to come to the negotiating table with the political will and the intention to move forward so that, when we next address this issue at the United Nations — as we inevitably will — we may once again be in a position to welcome progress.

Mr. Abu-Nimah (Jordan) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The question of the Middle East, at the heart of which is the Palestinian question, is one of the important perennial items on the agenda of our Organization. We had hoped — indeed, we had been convinced — that new achievements would emerge on the road to peace and that we would move towards peace in the years following the launching of the peace process six years ago in Madrid.

Today, witnessing stagnation in the negotiations and backsliding in the peace process, we cannot fail to express our deep concern. In this connection, we sincerely wish to draw attention to the dangers to peace in the entire region as a result of the stagnation of the peace process. Nevertheless, this will not weaken our faith in peace, nor will it affect our resolute commitment to work towards peace, regardless of the obstacles and difficulties we may encounter.

In this regard, we would like to underscore the attachment of the other parties to the peace process and Israel's stubborn insistence on taking positions intended to block the initiatives made in favour of peace.

The delegation of Jordan, participating in the discussion on this agenda item this year as it has done in previous years, can only reaffirm what has already been said. The events of the last year have only served to reaffirm the soundness of our message to the Assembly. We can only reiterate our faith in the fundamental role

played by the United Nations in the peace process and in fulfilling its responsibilities in this matter. It is our duty today to strengthen that role and underscore its responsibility to support the efforts made by the two sponsors of the peace process and the other parties concerned and to step up the initiatives to extricate the peace process from its paralysing impasse.

The United Nations is the essential forum of international legitimacy. It is the United Nations that currently adopts decisive resolutions concerning international disagreements and disputes. It is the United Nations that demands that certain Member States yield to the will of the international community and abide, with strength and determination, by the resolutions adopted. The Organization, after all, is the universal conscience of the peoples of the world. Most resolutions are formulated and adopted within its framework, in which are enshrined the principles, provisions and elements that form the basis for the settlement of the question of the Middle East and of Palestine.

Allow me here to refer to Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which constitutes the very foundation of the process that is under way. It was under this resolution that the peace process was launched in 1967. Were its letter and spirit to be implemented at all levels, the Palestinian people would be enabled to exercise their inalienable national and political rights, and the Israeli forces would withdraw from all the territories occupied since 1967. Thus would peace finally come to the region.

The question of the Middle East and the peace process in that region are my Government's primary concern, and Jordan's contribution in this area has been acknowledged since 1948. Jordan has been pursuing in its foreign relations a policy based on the spirit and the letter of the Charter of the United Nations, because it is convinced of the need peacefully to settle all disputes, regardless of the circumstances surrounding them. As soon as the first indications appeared that the process of settling the Middle East conflict was making headway, Jordan hastened to join in working for the success of that historic initiative, which was launched with determination at Madrid. We did so with the same realistic and positive attitude with which we had approached all the previous initiatives taken during those long years of conflict, with the goal of achieving a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict in accordance with the norms of justice, legitimacy, United Nations resolutions and international law.

The peace we seek is just, lasting and comprehensive. That same concept has been expressed by most of the parties directly concerned with the Middle East conflict. Our commitment to achieve peace is a strategic one — a principled commitment based on our conviction that peace is a necessity for all States and peoples of the region, and an imperative need for each of the countries of the region. The achievement of that peace could radically transform the history of the region and give rise to new prospects for peace, security and peaceful coexistence for the region's inhabitants. It could also open the way for the Arab and Israeli peoples to begin living under normal conditions, which they have not been able to do for six decades.

Based on our commitment to establish that peace, in 1994 we signed a peace agreement with Israel that put the process back on track, opening a new chapter in the history of good-neighbourliness and affirming the principles and the basis underlying the cooperation and the relations between the two countries in various areas. Jordan has opened the gates of peace unconditionally and without restrictions, and has done so without diminishing the importance of any of the elements required for normalization of the relations between the two States. Our goal is for the Israeli-Jordanian peace to serve as an example to other countries — an example of our commitment to respect, implement in letter and in spirit, and transform into reality the agreements entered into. We want our Israeli neighbours to know that we do not believe that peace consists merely of the signing of a document as a goal in itself. It is not a way of sanctioning the causes of war or of consolidating gains; it is a reality, a practice and a form of cooperation based on principles of mutual respect and on scrupulous and responsible respect for commitments entered into.

That agreement complemented the initiatives taken by the parties to the negotiations and by the international community to move the peace process forward, in particular since it came in the wake of the achievement of peace with Egypt and of the significant progress made in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with the signing of the Oslo accords and subsequent agreements.

We had strongly hoped that progress would also be made in the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese negotiations with a view to achieving a comprehensive settlement of the question and thus moving on to the development and economic reconstruction of the region. Unfortunately, this has not happened yet.

For these reasons, today we must in an objective and considered manner pinpoint the reasons for the obstacles that have hampered the peace process. We appeal to all parties to that process to redouble their efforts to break the deadlock, because we believe that the responsibility to establish a comprehensive peace and finalize the process is a collective one. This does not mean, however, that the parties to the negotiations bear equal responsibility for the deadlock and the failure to implement the agreements reached.

Based on our commitment to establish that peace and to consolidate the gains achieved so far, and in accordance with the principles of the Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement, today we must engage in honest and frank dialogue with Israel to say that we have no other choice than to pursue the peace process, for that is the only viable solution. Failing that, the region would become caught up once again in a vicious circle of violence, confrontation and extremism, and there are numerous examples to that effect. This is an option we reject.

The security concerns that Israel is emphasizing are real ones. Security is one of the objectives of the peace process, whose implementation would benefit all the countries of the region. But security results from progress towards peace, not from a refusal to implement the agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinians. Security cannot become a reality when practices that are seriously detrimental to the Palestinians, their rights and their aspirations are being carried out with increased intensity. Security cannot be brought about as long as the settlement policies are in force, whether aimed at developing existing settlements or establishing new ones. Peace will not be brought about by confiscating Arab land; by blowing up Arab houses; by confiscating identity cards from the Arab inhabitants of Jerusalem and isolating that city from the rest of the West Bank; by restricting the Palestinian people's freedom of movement, blockading them and detaining them; or by allowing Israeli security forces legally to use force and violence when interrogating suspects, which runs counter to the principles of international law, fundamental human rights and justice.

This is the sort of thing the civilized world has always rejected and condemned. We know how these practices make the Palestinian people feel. This can only make things worse and plunge the region once again into the climate of confrontation, hostility and bitterness we had thought we were leaving behind when we embarked on the road to peace. These practices jeopardize the peace and security of all of the inhabitants of the region and deprive them of stability, and they give rise to uncertainty, concern and mistrust among the countries of the region.

The peace process is based on well-known, clear-cut principles, most importantly the exchange of Arab lands occupied since 1967 for peace. That principle, enshrined in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), affirms the inadmissibility of the acquisition and annexation of territories by force, and forms one of the bases of the peace process and its mandate.

The peace we hope to see is a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. How can there be peace if the land of legitimate property owners is not restored? And how can that land be restored if settlements continue to be built and presented as *faits accomplis*? How can there be peace, and how can the final goal of all parties be reached if Israel officially declares that it will continue its settlements policy and that it still intends to withdraw only from a small number of tiny areas in the West Bank? Israel's declarations have had a very bad effect on the trust we have tried to promote among the countries of the region with a view to furthering the peace process and fostering cooperation, reconciliation, understanding and hope, to putting an end to the hurts and tragedies of the past, and to taking the path towards peace. There can be peace only with the total elimination of the causes of the conflict — not with their perpetuation. There can be peace only through justice — not through the occupation of territories, expansion and the denial of the rights of others. Justice is the basis of peace, and peace must be the framework of security.

The Israeli-Palestinian agreement defers consideration of certain matters, such as the construction of new settlements, the question of Jerusalem, and the question of refugees, until the final stages of the negotiations; the point here is to make it easier to move forward in the peace process. It is only natural that deferred questions should not be the subject of negotiations until the proper time. It is inconceivable that the deferral in consideration of these questions should be put forward as a pretext for altering the situation on the ground to the benefit of the occupier; this complicates matters and makes a solution impossible.

In our view, deferring negotiations on these significant, core issues must not be an excuse for ignoring those issues and for not finding just, acceptable solutions. Anyone who thinks otherwise is wrong, because any unresolved question could give rise to new

tensions and destroy the results already achieved. Only viable solutions can be genuine solutions.

The rights of individuals cannot be neglected in the hope that in time they will be forgotten. All such issues must be on the agenda of the negotiations; there must be a serious and objective attempt to resolve them, and a demonstration of determination to find legitimate, lasting and acceptable solutions that would make peace an acceptable choice for the peoples of the region. This peace must be protected so that it will become the lasting peace we all desire. We consider that this is the path to peace, and that the resolution of deferred questions such as those relating to refugees, to Jerusalem and to the sovereignty of the Palestinian people with a State on its own territory, with Jerusalem as its capital, is the sole guarantee of security, stability, progress and prosperity for all the peoples of the region, Arabs and Israelis alike.

A comprehensive solution requires the resumption of the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli negotiations at the point where they broke off, with a view to achieving the equality which we desire and which is necessary. The negotiations must be based on the legitimacy reflected in the Madrid Conference, on the formula of land for peace, and on Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Progress towards peace and the achievement of peace constitute the sole guarantee that there will be an end to extremism and violence and that security will take deep root in the region.

The question of Jerusalem is at the core of the issue of peace. A balanced and just solution is required. It has been recognized in all international legal and political forums that East Jerusalem is an organic part of the West Bank occupied since 1967 and that the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, applies there, as do the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Security Council has devoted particular attention to Jerusalem since the beginning of the Israeli occupation. On this matter it has adopted resolution 252 (1968), which considered as invalid all Israeli measures which tend to change the legal status of the Holy City; the Council has also rejected all attempts to change the demographic and geographic nature of the city.

Security Council resolution 476 (1980) calls for an end to Israeli occupation of all Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and Security Council resolution 478 (1980) calls upon countries not to transfer their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem. That resolution is a striking example of international determination to reject Israel's annexation of the city. That annexation contravenes the fundamental principles of international law. Jerusalem is occupied territory to which legitimate international resolutions are applicable, in particular the resolutions of the Security Council.

As I have noted, the discussion of the question of Jerusalem is deferred under the Israeli-Palestinian agreement to the final phase of the negotiations, given the importance and sensitivity of that question. That is why any Israeli measure aimed at compromising the Madrid process or at changing the legal, political or demographic status of Jerusalem must be viewed as an attempt to create a new reality and a *fait accompli* and impose them on the Arab side when the negotiations reach their final stage. That would prejudge the status of the Holy City before the final phase of negotiations had taken place. This would be unacceptable and would not further the cause of peace. Nor would it improve the well-being or help realize the aspirations of the peoples of the region to a better future marked by stability, cooperation and mutual respect.

Let me stress with respect to the deferral of the question of Jerusalem that pending the results of the final phase of negotiations, Israel must maintain the status quo in the city, must not isolate the remainder of the West Bank, and must refrain from confiscating the identity papers of life-long residents and from closing the borders to other inhabitants of the occupied region who come to the city for prayer, education, medical care, and business, and to visit their families and loved ones.

For all those reasons, and with a view to preserving the religious, cultural and historical character of Jerusalem, the Government of Jordan continues to maintain, restore and protect the Holy Places, now under the yoke of occupation, and to provide the necessary support for the relevant officials, with a view to protecting those places from all dangers pending the final solution to which we look forward. Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of three revealed religions; we want it to be a noble symbol of peace and peaceful coexistence. The fact that the settlers no longer hold sway in Arab part of Jerusalem does not mean that the city should ever again be divided, or that new walls and ramparts should be built; it means rather that justice has been done.

The international community must shoulder its weighty and fundamental responsibility to give fresh impetus to the peace process so that it may reach a successful and lasting conclusion. It is only the people

who can lay the solid foundations of peace, but they must not be content with thinking of peace as an abstract idea; they expect concrete dividends and results. My country hopes that the international community will come to a better understanding of the economic, financial and development needs of the States of the region and of the region as a whole, as well as of the need to establish and safeguard peace in the Middle East. That is why we attach importance to all the economic summit conferences that promote the implementation and strengthening of plans for the economic development of the region, such as the Casablanca conference, the Amman conference, the Cairo conference and the recent Doha conference. We are encouraged and pleased by the progress achieved thanks to those conferences, but have noted that the stagnation of the peace process has had its repercussions on the most recent events. Many countries that participate in the conferences have noted the need to link economic and political progress in order to guarantee the success of the economic and development process parallel with the peace process.

We believe too that the United Nations, which represents international legitimacy, should play a vital role in giving fresh impetus to the peace process and in strengthening the efforts of the two co-sponsors. We believe that it would be useful for the European Union too play a strengthened role in consolidating the efforts of the co-sponsors and that it should mobilize good offices in all areas to support the peace process and improve the conditions for success. This is particularly true since the European Union has contributed to the peace process from the very outset and continues to help bolster the parallel economic development of the region.

The President took the Chair.

Mr. Jayanama (Thailand): As in other regions, there are conflicts between nations in the Middle East, especially those that share borders. Since its earliest days the United Nations has been concerned with the various conflicts in the Middle East. It is, however, undeniable that the core of the situation in the Middle East is the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Since 1947 various aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict have been dealt with by the United Nations. The 1991 Madrid accords led the international community to believe that peace would prevail in the Middle East, that Israel would withdraw its troops from the occupied territories in Syria and Lebanon, that the Palestinian people would be able to exercise its right to self-determination and that the question of Jerusalem would be resolved. However, Thailand regrets that recent setbacks have impeded progress in the Middle East peace process. We strongly believe that the only way to achieve a comprehensive, just and durable peace in the Middle East is through the peace process.

It is Thailand's firm belief that the peace process cannot be accomplished by any one side alone. Peace cannot be achieved by unilateral commitments to agreed obligations; rather, all parties have to honour their commitments. Thailand has always supported the Middle East peace process and hopes that all parties concerned will exercise restraint and flexibility in order to put the derailed process back on track and that peaceful negotiations will help overcome the current stalemate. We commend the efforts being undertaken by various parties to help bring this about. To attain peaceful negotiations, all sides must make efforts to remove obstructions and obstacles, and they must implement all the agreements reached as soon and as thoroughly as possible. Moreover, terrorism and acts of violence in any form or manifestation, which normally victimize civilian populations in general, must cease.

As we all know, at the core of the Middle East problem is the issue of Palestine. Since the Madrid accords in 1991, the signing in 1993 of the Declaration of Principles and the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which provided new hope for a peaceful solution to the situation in the Middle East, the Middle East peace process has experienced its ups and downs. However, on 17 January 1997, this process gained new momentum with the signing of the Hebron agreement.

Despite this positive development, the General Assembly this year convened three times to consider the serious situation in the occupied Arab territories, particularly the situation in Jerusalem. At its resumed session in March this year, the Assembly, considering the situation in Jerusalem, adopted resolution 51/223, which called on Israel, *inter alia*, to refrain from all actions or measures, including settlement activities, which could alter the facts on the ground and pre-empt the final status negotiations.

Although the General Assembly, acting under its resolution 377 (V), entitled "Uniting for peace", adopted resolutions ES-10/2 and ES-10/3, the situation in Palestine today is still volatile. According to the Secretary-General's report pursuant to Assembly resolution ES-10/2, adopted in April this year and contained in document A/ES-10/6, the Jebel Abu Ghneim

incident is viewed as particularly serious — politically, geographically, demographically and economically. My delegation would also like to express its concern over the findings of the report with regard to the effects on the Middle East peace process. The refusal of a party to the process

> "to abandon construction of a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim appears to represent ... the largest single negative factor in the breakdown of the peace process and the fomenting of unrest in the occupied territories." [A/ES-10/6, para. 15 (e)]

The report also states,

> "A number of further activities deemed to be in violation of international law continued to raise tensions and to jeopardize both the peace process and the rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories." [ibid., para. 23]

My delegation would therefore like to register its concern that the aforementioned activities could further complicate the already difficult negotiations, because the final status of Jerusalem is still subject to the outcome of negotiations between the two parties.

It is regrettable to note that every year, for a very long period of time, the United Nations has consistently discussed the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East. Today we are still discussing this issue, after having adopted many relevant resolutions by overwhelming majority.

The delegation of Thailand would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm its full support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and for the Middle East peace process, as well as its commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

It is my delegation's sincere hope that all sides in the conflict will see the benefit of peace and that the Middle East peace process will soon produce a negotiated give-and-take solution acceptable to all.

The President: Before calling on the next speaker, I would like to read out what is written on one of the pages in my file:

> "I must appeal to representatives to be good enough to keep silent in the General Assembly Hall in order to maintain the dignity of the Assembly and out of courtesy to the speaker."

Believe me, I am now watching the General Assembly Hall, and there is a lot of movement here. Unfortunately, those representatives who are standing do not even hear me. Therefore, I am appealing to discipline. It is impossible to work. We have before us a very complicated and very important issue, and there is so much noise. There is no Iron Curtain now, but there is a glass curtain here. You can conduct your consultations behind the glass curtain.

I would be very grateful to all delegations for observing standards of conduct in the General Assembly Hall. It is really very difficult for the speaker to deliver his address.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): My delegation associates itself with the statement of the European Union. However, in view of the special significance we attach to the Middle East situation, I would like to make a few additional comments and observations.

Let me say at the outset that Cyprus's long and rich history has always been heavily influenced by developments in the Middle East. Situated at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia, my country has throughout the centuries been a bridge between the peoples of the Middle East and Europe.

In seeking to maintain and strengthen our ties with the European Union, with which we expect to start accession negotiations as early as next April, the promotion of our relations with all our neighbours in the Middle East also remains a significant pillar of our foreign policy.

The recent alarming developments in the Middle East have shown the precarious nature of the peace process and highlighted the imperative need to redouble the efforts for the survival and ultimately successful outcome of the process upon which millions of people, both in the region and internationally, have pinned great hopes.

My Government supports all the initiatives and efforts aimed at finding a comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem. We reaffirm our support for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242

(1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which provide the framework for a viable peace in the Middle East. At the same time, we recognize the right of all States to exist in peace with their neighbours within safe and internationally recognized borders. We denounce, in the strongest terms, terrorism and violence against innocent civilians.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Glafcos Clerides, reaffirmed our friendship with the Palestinian people and our support for the efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement, bringing lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

Following the present stalemate with deep concern, we are convinced of the need for the peace process to be injected with new spirit and momentum to move it out of its present difficulties. The Government of Cyprus remains committed to playing its modest part in a practical way in the enhancement of the peace process. In this regard, we express our belief that in order to have stability, the agreements between the parties should be faithfully implemented. There is no other way for stability in that sensitive region to be achieved than by than a peaceful solution through negotiation, reconciliation, trust and cooperation.

For this to happen, it is essential to avoid measures which place obstacles in the way of the implementation of the peace process, including the closure of Palestinian territories and the building of settlements, which make it more difficult to move the peace process forward. At the same time, the economic advancement of the Palestinian people remains a determining factor for stability and ultimate rapprochement in the Middle East. For this reason, the Government of Cyprus has prepared a special programme of economic assistance to the Palestinian people, which is currently being implemented. The programme includes training for about a hundred Palestinian officials in Cyprus, follow-up visits by Cypriot experts and the building of two medical centres.

While we consider the Palestinian problem to be the core issue of the Middle East conflict, we support the resumption of the negotiations between Israel and Syria and the opening of talks between Israel and Lebanon. A fundamental element of our position in the Middle East, and indeed in all situations of occupation and invasion, is the withdrawal of foreign forces from the occupied territories.

The prospect of a peaceful and prosperous Middle East is cherished by all. It can be secured not by unilateral actions, violence or military build-up, but by a common vision of a better future through economic progress, stability and social justice. It is the hope of my Government, my country and my countrymen that this vision will not be lost.

Mr. Richardson (United States of America): This has not been an easy year for the peace process in the Middle East. There have been incidents of terrorism and outbreaks of violence. There have been misunderstandings and periods of doubt. Progress has been slow. Extremist factions would like to believe that the momentum towards peace has stalled. We cannot accept that. The past is too filled with suffering; the opportunity for true reconciliation has been too long in coming; and the logic of peace remains too compelling to slide backwards now. Despite the hard challenges they face, the parties to the Madrid process have clearly stated their commitment to moving forward. The General Assembly should honour this effort and endorse this commitment.

Each year a number of resolutions adopted here serve only to thwart the peace process. They do not recognize the progress that has been made so far. Such resolutions have the effect of criticizing the negotiating stances or tactics of the parties, fixing blame for incidents that have complicated the process in recent months, or placing the onus on one party to make concessions. We believe such elements undermine the basic purpose of the role of the United Nations in achieving peace in the region. A just, lasting peace can happen only through direct negotiations in the region between the parties concerned. It will not be imposed from New York, although progress can certainly be hindered from here. Negative resolutions distract the parties from their work, and contribute to an atmosphere of ill will and mistrust that only makes the task ahead harder.

As we speak, Palestinians and Israelis remain hard at work negotiating the next important steps in their mutual search for peace. To reinvigorate the possibility of a helpful United Nations role in the peace process, we continue to believe, there should be a positive resolution to serve to note the progress made by the parties to date, encourage them to continue efforts to reach a just and lasting solution to the problems that divide them and express the strong United Nations support for that process. I would like to take this opportunity to express our hope that Lebanon, Israel and Syria will also achieve

progress in negotiations. In this regard, I would like to reaffirm my Government's commitment to Lebanon's political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Those objectives were stated in Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which my Government supports.

In conclusion, the path to peace is a dynamic process. I entreat all delegations here to work constructively, to encourage and contribute to the momentum of the process, so that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace can be achieved.

Mr. Biørn Lian (Norway): Exactly a year has passed since the adoption by the General Assembly of the last "positive resolution" on the Middle East peace process. With few exceptions, it has not been a good year for the peace process. The work of the General Assembly has reflected increasing frustration on both sides, as well as among the international community, at the lack of progress in the negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and delays in the implementation of the Oslo agreements.

There are a number of reasons for this unfortunate development. It is clear that the parties themselves share the responsibility for progress and for setbacks in the peace process. The international community nonetheless has the right to express its opinion on the issues at stake. It has been doing so repeatedly for the last 50 years, since the passing of the General Assembly partition resolution, resolution 181 (II), in 1947. This year the General Assembly has been particularly vocal about the setbacks in the peace process, not least during the emergency special session.

Over the past year we have seen repeated use of violence and terrorism by extremist minorities. I am sorry to say that 1997 has been quite a successful one for destructive forces in the Middle East — for the enemies of peace. Regrettably, we have also seen unilateral actions, designed to pre-empt the final status negotiations.

We have, however, also seen progress in the peace process, something which the General Assembly must strongly support. The Hebron Protocol, which was signed and implemented in January, proves the ability of the parties to push the peace process forward and honour their own commitments. In recent weeks we have seen a resumption of negotiations on outstanding issues in the Interim Agreement. The United Nations must not only applaud but also actively encourage such progress.

Against this background, we believe that the General Assembly should reconfirm its constructive approach to the peace process, reconfirm its wholehearted support for the peace process, reconfirm the validity of the Oslo Agreements and, first and foremost, reconfirm that its supreme aim is to assist the parties in their quest for peace. This the General Assembly has done every year since 1993, and we sincerely hope that it will be possible to do it again this year.

Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): My country's delegation would like to express its deep regret at the fact that this important opportunity to discuss agenda item 37 has turned into polemics which are intended to hide the facts and to obfuscate the grave responsibility of the Israeli leadership under its Prime Minister for the sorry state of affairs with regard to the Middle East peace process. It is unacceptable — in fact, impossible — to go on deceiving ourselves and international public opinion.

The peace process is not in good shape, and the sponsors of the draft resolution on this question have failed to refer to that. The peace process is in crisis, and affairs in the Middle East are becoming more complicated. Arab Governments are exercising great restraint to prevent the situation from exploding. We must recognize the reality and frankly refer to the party responsible for the situation. Silence, evasion and prevarication, which are presently practised, will not bring the Prime Minister of Israel to his senses but only add to his intransigence, self-assuredness and rigidity.

The two sponsors of the peace process bear the basic responsibility for deterring the Israeli policies that are destroying the peace process. We have a rare opportunity, one that may not be repeated, to reach a just, comprehensive and durable solution to the problem of the Middle East. We should not allow the Prime Minister of Israel to impede the attainment of this historic achievement. Silence, evasiveness and disregard of the facts will not serve peace, the credibility of the sponsors of the peace process or the credibility of the international Organization, which has for many years applauded their efforts aimed at laying down the bases of peace, and the launching of the train of negotiations towards that objective.

Any attempt to persuade the General Assembly to adopt a draft resolution that makes no reference to the latest developments or ignores the basic principles agreed upon in the peace process, especially the notion of land

for peace and the necessity of implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), would represent a great setback to the genuine hopes generated by our leaders and accepted by our peoples at the outset of the peace process.

What can we say to our peoples? What pretexts can the sponsors of peace employ? As for the international community, what can be said about it when it attempts to force implementation of some of its resolutions on certain countries in our region and turns a blind eye to the fact that Israel has never implemented tens of these resolutions adopted by the international community over many long years, including resolutions unanimously adopted by the Security Council? How long will such a double standard continue to prevail in addressing the problems of the world? How long will Israel remain above the law and above international legality?

This year the United Nations has witnessed many Security Council meetings convened to discuss the Israeli violations of international law and its confiscation of Arab lands in the areas it has occupied by force and by coercion since 1967 in order to establish settlements on them. The Security Council agreed on a resolution asking the Israeli Government to reverse such steps, but the Israeli Government did not comply.

The emergency special session has resumed on two occasions, and on each occasion the General Assembly has adopted two resolutions by an overwhelming majority, again demanding that Israel cease its colonial policies. What was the result? The Government of Israel rejected those resolutions constantly, with scorn and intransigence. Instead of our draft resolution warning against the consequences of continuation of the colonial policy and clearly and without ambiguity, with the unanimity of the international community, calling upon the Israeli leaders to cease that policy, we have a draft resolution blessing the artificial smiles, hollow words and misleading plans of the Israeli leaders. We even hear some describing the lands on which Israel is building its settlements as "lands in dispute", notwithstanding the fact that those lands were occupied by Israel by force in the 1967 war. Such a draft resolution and such statements have encouraged the Israeli leaders to continue their colonial policy, and caused the situation to worsen more and more. Acts of violence have increased, and tens of people have been killed or injured.

If we are addressing the conscience of the international community represented here in the General Assembly of the United Nations, it is because we continue to believe in international legality and in the norms of international law and the principles of the United Nations Charter. We call upon every Member here in the General Assembly to support us so that, together, we can build a true, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The security tension in that sensitive area of the world threatens international peace and security. Condoning Israel's non-implementation of United Nations resolutions is a threat to the entire regime of international law and international legality. Non-observance of the norms of international law in solving the Middle East problem will pave the way to the collapse of the regime of international law in all other parts of the world. Mutual support for the imposition of international legality would help to ease tensions and buttress the principles of justice and law.

Israel should not continue its occupation of Arab land, expelling the inhabitants and confiscating some of the land in order to allow more immigrants to settle on it. Millions of Palestinian refugees who were expelled by Israel from their homes should not be deprived of their right to return to their homes, in implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). How long will Israel remain intransigent and arrogant, employing all kinds of weapons, including weapons banned by the international community, in order to maintain its occupation of Arab lands? In southern Lebanon, scenes of violence, destruction, random bombings, killing, and mass injuries are nearly daily occurrences. This scene is the consequence of Israel's continued occupation of parts of southern Lebanon, notwithstanding Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

Israel wishes to impose on us by fire and steel political solutions that we have rejected in the past and that we will continually reject in the future. We have said that the only solution is for Israel to withdraw from our occupied land, in accordance with resolution 425 (1978). Israel must also withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines that existed on 4 June 1967, and must resume negotiations from the point at which they stopped.

Arab leaders have repeatedly emphasized that Israel's commitment to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) would pave the way for a durable and just peace in the area. But we want a durable, comprehensive and just peace based on the principles of international law and the resolutions of international legality.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I should like to inform members that there is a general agreement to postpone to Tuesday, 9 December, the introduction of and action on all the draft resolutions and amendments submitted under agenda item 36, "Question of Palestine", and under agenda item 37, "The situation in the Middle East". The time of the meeting will be announced in the *Journal*.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Danesh-Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today the General Assembly heard a misleading statement by the representative of the Israeli regime on the situation in the Middle East. The statement, portrayed as an analytical discussion of the critical situation in that part of the world, was drafted and delivered to distort the existing bitter realities in the Middle East and the alarming status quo created solely as a result of the unlawful policies and infamous practices of the Israeli regime in that volatile region.

In that statement baseless and unsubstantiated allegations were made against some regional States, including my country, to divert the attention of the international community from the illegal policies and inhuman actions of Israel, such as the continued occupation of the territories of others, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.

The failed Israeli attack against southern Lebanon in early September this year and the recent assassination attempt against certain individuals by Israeli agents in Jordan are chilling manifestations of Israeli State terrorism.

We would like to reiterate our position that our support for the Lebanese people is of a humanitarian and moral nature. Those who are fighting the foreign occupation in the region are in fact exercising their legitimate rights, recognized by international law, and they can by no means be labelled terrorists. Thus the people of southern Lebanon are entitled to struggle to liberate their homeland from Israeli occupation.

The misleading statement to the Assembly today was a futile effort to sow discord among countries in the region. I should like to emphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran enjoys good relations with other Islamic countries and endeavours to promote brotherly relations with all neighbouring and Islamic countries. As everyone knows, the Islamic Republic of Iran is hosting the Eighth Islamic Summit in Tehran, which is clear proof of its position in the Islamic world and its intention to promote those brotherly and friendly relations.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic wishes to exercise its right of reply to respond to the misleading statements and lies of the Israeli representative this morning before this body. Although we are aware that representatives know the historical facts of the situation in the Middle East and its development, we should like to emphasize the following.

First, Israel was the party to initiate aggression, with aggression against Syrian farms and villages and cities in the period from 1948 until its occupation of the Syrian Golan in 1967. This was with the objective of ejecting Syrian farmers from their land and preventing them from reaping their harvests. The authenticity of what we say is documented in reports by truce monitors during the period referred to, which confirm that the Israeli army did initiate these attacks. These reports are available in the archives of the United Nations for whoever wishes to refer to them. Memoranda published by high United Nations officials charged with monitoring the armistice agreements between Syria and Israel at the time also prove our position.

Secondly, the Israeli representative claimed that the Golan is important for Israel's security. This is the very language used by Israel to annex the Syrian Golan in 1981. It is the very language used by the current head of the Israeli Government to hold on to the occupied Syrian territory. Syria will not, under any pretext, cede even one particle of the soil of its land. Such claims also contradict all the bases on which the peace process begun in Madrid in 1991, was built. The principle there was land for peace and respect for international legitimacy, the Charter of the United Nations, which rejects the acquisition by force of land belonging to others, and United Nations resolutions, particularly, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We wonder

whether any sane person in the world can expect Syria to contract peace with the Israeli Government while Syrian land is in Israeli hands.

At this point I should like to recall the guarantees given by the United States of America to Syria that it would not accept the annexation of one inch of the Syrian Golan occupied in 1967.

Thirdly, the representative of Israel spoke in a rather jocular manner on the issue of armaments in the Middle East. It seems that he imagined himself speaking in Disneyland and not in the General Assembly of the United Nations. Every nation of the world, big or small, knows that Israel has been qualitatively and quantitatively militarily superior to all the Arab armies since 1948.

Suffice it to refer to the fact that Israel possesses dozens of nuclear warheads and all kinds of other weapons of mass destruction, locally produced. This is in addition to all it receives from the most sophisticated weapons factories in other countries, which provide it with the most modern tanks, aircraft and guns.

Fourthly, Israel has rejected the resumption of talks on the Syrian track from the point where talks stopped. Israel conditions a return to the negotiating table on returning to square one. So Israel is the one conditioning the resumption of negotiations while, at the same time, practising a rather blind demagogy in front of international public opinion, to deceive it into believing that it is Syria that refuses to resume negotiations.

Fifthly, daily declarations and statements made by the Israeli Prime Minister on keeping the Arab occupied territories and on building more settlements and other projects in the occupied Syrian Golan all prove the falsity of these hollow statements whereby the Israeli representative tries in vain to dress up the image of his leadership. This is in addition to his attempts aimed at misleading world public opinion.

Syria opened the door to the holding of the Madrid Peace Conference when it responded to the United States initiative on the peace process. Syria is prepared to resume the peace process when Israel takes the initiative in setting aside its conditions, particularly that of returning to square one before resuming the peace negotiations. Syria renews its commitment to peace on the bases on which the peace process was begun, and not on other bases or formulae which are aimed only at satisfying Israel's false pride and consolidating its hegemony and occupation, without bringing about what the peoples of the region are aspiring to in terms of dignity, security and stability.

Mr. Gold (Israel): There is a myth being advanced in this Chamber by certain speakers: that the peace process over the last three to four years was in an idyllic state until the May 1996 elections that brought the current Israeli Government to power. Those speakers have forgotten that hundreds of Katyusha rockets fell on Israel in the Galilee, launched from areas in Lebanon under Syrian military control. They have forgotten men, women and children who were forced to live in bomb shelters repeatedly in northern Israel. They have forgotten about the population of Kiryat Shmona, many of whom had to abandon their homes while the Katyusha rockets came into the centre of town. They have also forgotten, when they speak, about repeated deliveries by Iranian aircraft of weapons and of armaments for Hezbollah that are supplied through Damascus International Airport and then transshipped to Eastern Lebanon for use against Israel.

Those who recall this idyllic state of the peace process also forget the repeated bus bombings that have occurred in the centre of practically every Israeli city while we have been negotiating. The main challenge we have been facing is the fact that the threats, the bombings and the missile attacks hitting Israel are coming from areas under the military control of our negotiating partners.

Now Israel has decided not to choose the course of despair. But Israel has chosen, nonetheless, to proceed forward in the peace process, and it is this Government of Israel that, immediately after its election, sat with representatives of Lebanon and Syria and completed a protocol on the establishment of a monitoring group in southern Lebanon, where Lebanese Syrian officers sit with Israeli officers, as well as with French and American officials, and discuss the problems of security in southern Lebanon. It is this Government that, despite the repeated bus bombings and repeated threats to innocent Israelis, sat with representatives of the Palestinian Authority and negotiated and signed the Hebron Protocol and then implemented that Protocol and redeployed from the town of Hebron.

It was this Government that charted a course for 1997, a road map for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority called the Note for the Record. It is this Government that has tried to take an impaired peace process and make it work. We call on the Governments, the Missions represented here in the

General Assembly, to help us with this task by taking positive positions on the draft resolutions that are being put before them. But please do not make an already difficult process, which we have inherited, any more difficult than it was when we came into power.

Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon) (*interpretation from Arabic*): We have heard the representative of the occupying Power in southern Lebanon denounce the guns of those who are resisting the occupation of their land, a part of their country, calling them terrorists. Why? Because they refuse to be cowed by the oppression of Israeli occupation forces; because they insist on their freedom and on liberating the soil of their country from this shameful defilement thereof. Does this person, wearing the gloves of death believe that he could deceive the Assembly? Does he think that the world does not see how he, through his possession of weapons of mass destruction and means of annihilation, commits daily acts of aggression against the sanctity of our land, of our independence, of our sovereignty? Can he continue to flout with arrogance and vanity the repeated resolutions of the United Nations — resolutions of international legitimacy? What kind of history will we record for our children to read one day? The history of a Member of this international Organization that thumbs its nose at this international Organization, at the United Nations forces, the resolutions of the Security Council, at the resolutions of the General Assembly, at the resolutions of the human rights commissions, and places itself above the law and makes of its edict the rule of law and of international legitimacy? By what norm of international law can those resisting the occupation of their own land by oppressive foreign forces be labelled terrorists? Is occupation by force not terrorism incarnate? How long can he continue to believe that he is convincing the Assembly that attacking his forces which occupy our land is terrorism, while his bombardment of civilian homes, schools, hospitals and of public facilities is a legitimate act of self-defence? What law allows the Israeli occupier to speak in such a tone?

As we stand at the threshold of the twenty-first century, it is shameful to accept such Israeli logic in this edifice, where all the peoples of the world have placed their hopes in international peace, security and stability.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.

United Nations A/52/PV.62

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

62nd plenary meeting
Thursday, 4 December 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 59

Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters

Draft resolution (A/52/L.7)

Amendment (A/52/L.47)

The President: I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that two proposals have so far been submitted under the agenda item 59 of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, entitled "Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters". They are draft resolution A/52/L.7 and the amendments to it contained in document A/52/L.47.

As we are opening the debate on agenda item 59, I would like to reconfirm my understanding that the General Assembly will not be taking any decision on this item at this stage of its consideration, in accordance with the assurances that I have received to this effect.

Referring to my consultations with the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, I would also like to advise the Assembly that there is no requirement for proposals submitted under a particular agenda item to be introduced at the beginning of the consideration of that item by the Assembly. In accordance with the established practices of the General Assembly, proposals submitted under a particular agenda item are introduced by their sponsors prior to the General Assembly's proceeding to take a decision on them.

In view of these considerations, it is my understanding that the statements made by Member States in the course of the debate on agenda item 59, without prejudice to their substance, should not be considered formal introductions of the proposals.

It is also my understanding that the introductions of the proposals under this agenda item, if and when they take place, will be in the order they were submitted, in accordance with, *inter alia*, rules 78, 90 and 91 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

We shall now proceed with the debate on this agenda item.

Mr. Kausikan (Singapore): Our discussions on Security Council reform over the last four years have resulted in two clear, if somewhat contradictory, conclusions. First, there is little doubt that the majority of Member States consider the current composition and working methods of the Security Council archaic and unsatisfactory. Secondly, it is, unfortunately, equally clear that, notwithstanding this widely held view, there are few prospects for early progress. The key difficulties arise from the many contradictions and ambiguities in the positions that the current permanent members have taken

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on Security Council reform; and, of course, the Charter gives them a decisive influence.

My delegation has on a number of previous occasions publicly analysed these contradictions and ambiguities. I will not repeat in detail what we have already exposed. I refer members to my delegation's statements in the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform of 5 and 9 May and most recently to my Minister's statement in this Hall on 29 September.

A central issue is the failure of the current permanent members to clearly pronounce themselves on whether a new permanent member, be it from an industrialized or a developing country, should have the veto. The power of a new permanent member is not a question that can be deferred to a later date merely to make it easier to select new permanent members. This is because the powers of the new permanent members are intrinsic to the very notion and definition of permanent membership.

We did not expect answers to the questions that we posed, and we have not received any satisfactory answer. We are not particularly disappointed. Resolving the ambiguities is not just a matter of negotiating a text in a working group. It is not just a question of clever drafting or diplomatic ingenuity to paper over differences. The ambiguities reflect profound geopolitical uncertainties that can be settled only over time by events in the real world, and not in any working group.

This ought to be obvious if we consider the origins of the current permanent membership. The countries that are permanent members were the victors of the Second World War. They gave themselves the privilege of the veto because they were then so essential to the maintenance of international peace and security that they had to be reassured that they could not be compelled to take any action that could lead to conflicts among themselves. This would have broken up the United Nations.

At the end of the Second World War, it was relatively easy to determine the identity of these powerful few. With most of the world in ruins after a long and devastating conflict, it was easy to discern the winners and losers. It was logical that the victors should bear the primary responsibility for maintaining the new international order. In any case, there was no choice. No one else was in a position to successfully argue against their claims. Their status as permanent members reflected the compelling geopolitical realities of the day.

Nevertheless, even then two of the three big victors — the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom — were sceptical of Roosevelt's view of China's ability to play a major role in the post-war world, and Churchill's insistence on including France among the elite group met with similar scepticism from Roosevelt and Stalin. It should not therefore surprise us that we now run into even greater difficulties in trying to decide who belongs in the new elite.

The end of the cold war took everybody by surprise. Its resolution was far from clear-cut. The end of the cold war has precipitated a period of transition and uncertainty. We are still debating the consequences because we are still living through them. It is of course obvious that the world has changed, but this does not in itself prescribe any particular new geopolitical configuration. The power structure of the post-cold-war international order is still evolving. The outcome of this process cannot as yet be predicted. The United Nations, as an Organization of sovereign States, must necessarily reflect international reality more than shape it, whatever else some may pretend to believe. But even this incontrovertible fact provides no practical guidance for our discussions on Security Council reform.

If the purpose of Security Council reform is to more accurately reflect the post-cold-war world, then, logically, there should now be only one permanent member. Only the United States now disposes of the political, military and economic clout on the global scale needed to maintain international peace and security. But, of course, it is politically unacceptable to have only one permanent member. And even the United States, in its post-cold-war mood of introspection, faces domestic political difficulties in exercising its undoubted capabilities. The Administration's failure to persuade Congress to pay its arrears to the United Nations is but one small symptom.

Even a cursory examination of the current situation of the other permanent members may lead us to wonder what real meaning permanent membership has in the contemporary situation of geopolitical flux and uncertainty. Russia's main preoccupations are internal, and understandably so. Given the serious problems that it is grappling with, Russia has neither the capability nor the desire to consistently exercise power on a global scale as the Soviet Union did. Russia will certainly rise again, but it will be a different Russia with global interests and relationships different from those of the Soviet Union.

China is already a rising Power, but it is still primarily a regional Power. In per capita terms it will be a poor country well into the next century. Its focus is on economic development and resolving urgent internal problems. Its primary international interest for many years to come will be to secure peace and stability around its immediate borders so that it can continue to grow and deal with its internal problems. It will not be as deeply engaged elsewhere.

The United Kingdom and France are now European Powers with at best only residual global influence and limited clout outside the European Union. The sad recent history of Bosnia demonstrated that even the most powerful European States were not capable of settling a European problem by themselves. It was the intervention of the United States that proved decisive, and the United States chose the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), not the United Nations Security Council, as the vehicle for its intervention.

It is clear that most of the current permanent members no longer have the will or the capability to exercise power on the global scale necessary to maintain international peace and security as envisaged by the Charter. It is a geopolitical reality that in present times several current permanent members are not permanent members because they are great Powers or global Powers in the traditional sense of these terms. By a reversal of logic, if they currently enjoy the status of a great or a global Power, it is primarily because they are already permanent members.

Before I am drowned out by howls of protest, let me hastily make my position clear. I am not suggesting that Security Council reform requires that any current permanent member be relegated to the common herd. Of course, the consequences of such a suggestion are too horrifying to contemplate, especially for the countries that will be directly affected. So let it be placed on the record that I accept and respect the historical fait accompli, even if its logic is no longer compelling. I recognize the useful and constructive roles that many current permanent members continue to play in international affairs. And even if these are not the roles for which they were originally given permanent status, they deserve our appreciation.

My point is simply that these are different roles. These are no longer unique roles that no other country is capable of assuming. Several other Members of the United Nations already play similar roles without any ambition of elevation to permanent status.

Perhaps our discussion on Security Council reform would progress a little better if we temporarily abandon futile arguments over number and identity for a more fundamental re-examination of the meaning of permanent membership in the last years of the twentieth century. Let us examine what is really needed to maintain international peace and security in the twenty-first century. This is why my delegation had suggested, as early as the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly four years ago, that our discussions on Security Council reform should begin with an examination of the criteria for permanent membership. We are encouraged that several other delegations appear to be coming around to this view.

Our essential point can be stated simply. A reformed Security Council must reflect the post-cold-war geopolitical configuration if it is to be effective. The crucial decisions that will affect this geopolitical configuration are not going to be made in New York, or even in London, Paris, Washington, Beijing, Moscow, Berlin or Tokyo. It is not even clear that the geopolitical configuration can be shaped by a conscious and planned process of decision-making. The post-cold-war geopolitical configuration is going to emerge only gradually, over time, through the interactions of different countries in different regions of the world. It will be shaped by developments that cannot yet be predicted, developments which will probably surprise even those countries whose policies precipitated them. We will only waste time if we continue to pretend, as we unfortunately too often have for the last four years, that we can gather in a room in New York to decide the twenty-first century's geopolitical power structure through abstract intellectual debates.

Let me conclude by illustrating the point more concretely. My delegation has on several occasions commented on the studied ambiguity with which several, if not the majority, of the current permanent members have cloaked crucial aspects of their position on Security Council reform. This is understandable. No country is ever comfortable with a change in a status quo that favours it. But, that said, I must also acknowledge that a majority of the permanent members have appeared most categoric in their desire to see Japan and Germany as new permanent members. Let me therefore take that as the starting point of my illustration.

Many countries, certainly including my own and perhaps even a majority of Member States, would agree that when general agreement is reached on the expansion of the Security Council, Japan and Germany should be

among the new permanent members. That Japan and Germany now exercise global economic clout is not in dispute. Nor is the fact that they want and are searching for a bigger international political role. These are positive developments. They are among the new realities whose consequences have yet to unfold.

But precisely because of this, there is still no clear consensus, either in Germany or Japan or in their respective regions, on the precise international roles they should play, particularly if this will involve the deployment of military forces. There has never been a period in the entire sweep of Asian history in which China and Japan have been simultaneously strong Powers. We are now entering such a period, with all its attendant uncertainties. In Europe, a newly unified Germany and a Russia that is still struggling to redefine itself apart from the former Soviet Union are both, for different reasons, currently internally preoccupied. Neither has yet definitively settled their relationship with each other or with their neighbours.

It is therefore not surprising that China and Russia, like all other permanent members, have not been clear on whether or not Japan and Germany should have the veto. It is therefore still unclear whether they really believe Germany and Japan should be new permanent members — and this even though Japan and Germany enjoy widespread support for permanent membership from many other Member States.

I am not suggesting that Moscow and Beijing are being particularly difficult or different. After all, even the United States has not yet clearly stated that it trusts its own treaty allies, whose elevation to permanent status it strongly and publicly advocates, sufficiently to give them a veto over American policies. And even if the Administration is willing to do so, I am not sure Congress would agree.

This hesitation and coyness is perhaps only prudent. Perhaps it is even a duty, given the geopolitical uncertainties of the contemporary international system. Nobody wants to give any hostages to fortune. For the same reason, no Government that really believes that its country deserves permanent status can permanently commit all future governments to giving up the veto. The geopolitical uncertainties are no less elsewhere in Asia, Africa and Latin America. They will certainly not be settled by conceptually contradictory slogans such as permanent rotational membership, as has been suggested by some.

I hope I am not misunderstood. I am not suggesting that China and Japan cannot cooperate or that Germany and Russia will never coexist. This is obviously not true, because they are already doing so. But the present happy situation is not to be taken for granted given the long, complex and often troubled history of relations between these countries — a history that, in the case of China and Japan, has been characterized by many centuries of profound ambiguity. It is not unreasonable for countries that enjoy the privileges of the status quo to prefer to avoid making precipitate decisions. In fact, this is an entirely reasonable position to take given the geopolitical uncertainties. It would therefore be equally unreasonable to expect Asia, Africa or Latin America to take precipitate decisions on who from their regions should enjoy permanent status.

Time and events will clarify matters. How much time, no one can presently honestly say. Events must mature and unfold naturally to clarify themselves. This is not a process that can or should be rushed.

We would do the United Nations and the Security Council grievous damage if we were to take decisions that might eventually bear only a tenuous relationship to what finally evolves in the real world. Any international organization of sovereign States dooms itself to irrelevance if it ignores or divorces itself from the realities in which it is embedded. And the shape of those realities can be only imperfectly glimpsed at present. This is why we, like other Non-Aligned Movement countries, have been consistent in cautioning against a hasty decision on Security Council reform. A Security Council that includes all who now most assiduously press their claims to permanent status, but excludes other, currently not so obvious candidates whose claims may yet become compelling, would not just be ineffective. It would tear this Organization apart.

Four years is not a long time, given the gravity of the issues at stake. We understand the frustrations of those who see their hopes and ambitions recede with each passing year of endless debate. But pressure-cooking the process will not settle the crucial geopolitical realities that will, in the end, be decisive. Those countries that deserve permanent status will be given it when the time is ripe, not before. And when the time is ripe, there is no power that can resist their claims. Let us therefore not lose faith or patience and by so doing come to regret the consequences.

Mr. Gomersall (United Kingdom): I do not wish to be misunderstood either. I do not want it to be thought that I am taking the floor in right of reply to the previous speaker. His views are always stimulating, though slightly exaggerated. But, as always, finding fault with the existing realities is somewhat of an evasion of the necessity which I think we all feel to try and find a way forward to the problems which he delineates, and the only way forward is to find a solution through negotiation. We have made a lot of painstaking efforts in that direction, and my delegation believes that the sensible thing to do is to continue.

It is always easy to attack the existing system without being quite so frank about the choices which all countries have to make with regard to the areas closest to themselves. We believe that the proposals which are on the table, in particular those submitted by President Razali last year, offer the best way of dealing with that admittedly very sensitive subject.

It was four years and one day ago that the General Assembly adopted resolution 48/26, which established the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council, four years in which everybody has been agreed on the objective of enlargement of the Security Council, but in which, to the disappointment and frustration of the vast majority of us, a clearly ratifiable proposal for enlargement has yet to emerge. But the issue of the enlargement of the Security Council and reform of the methods of work of the Security Council remains as important now as it seemed to be four years ago. The political case for this item of reform is just as compelling as it is for other aspects of the modernization of this Organization.

We are closer now to seeing the outlines of a solution than we were at this time last year. This progress can be ascribed to two major developments: first, the consultations carried out by the co-vice-chairmen of the Working Group last winter. Their soundings demonstrated beyond any doubt that the vast majority of Member States do not want a temporary, half-hearted reform in just one category of Council membership, but a durable and significant enlargement in both categories of membership that increases developing country representation in those two categories. This general objective has furthermore been endorsed by several of the permanent members. For this, and for the rest of their hard work, we owe the co-Vice-Chairmen, Ambassadors Breitenstein and Jayanama, a vote of great thanks.

The second development was the presentation last March, by the then President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Razali, of a draft resolution on reform. This moved the discussion in a more concrete direction, and was the sort of comprehensive proposal which had long been required. It built on the co-vice-chairmen's consultations. It identified the mainstream in the debate, and came to be regarded as successfully representing the negotiating middle ground. Although it presented a number of delegations, including my own, with problems, it offered by far the best prospect for a solution so far, and indeed sparked a considerable amount of further positive consideration about how some of the remaining issues might eventually be solved. This was perhaps the most fruitful time in our debate so far, and we look forward to further consideration of the proposal this year.

Of course, neither of these developments brought about a consensus. Like your predecessor, Mr. President, you will be wise enough to recognize that consensus on a solution to this particular issue is probably unobtainable. But we recognize the need to respect the requirements of Article 108 of the Charter in a resolution adopting amendments to the Charter. Indeed, the statutory two-thirds majority for such a resolution would be a barely acceptable minimum. We want further efforts on a concrete proposal to reconcile the views of the greatest possible number of Member States. But at the end of the day, the General Assembly is here to take political decisions, and every effort should be made to take the necessary decisions at this session of the General Assembly — and by the largest possible majority.

There is always an argument for putting something off. When Mr. Razali produced his proposal, the response was not so much that he had misjudged the content, but that more time should be given for consultation, particularly at the level of regional groups, and that the Assembly should not be rushed into a decision which would have lasting implications. That was nearly nine months ago. The proposal did serve, however, as an impetus for more focused thinking on how the tricky questions — in particular that of selecting new permanent members, especially from the developing world — should be approached, and in this regard it was a positive step forward.

Draft resolution A/52/L.7, sponsored by Italy and others, is, on the other hand, simply an invitation to eternal delay. Whatever the diversity of views among its supporters, it offers a backhanded endorsement of the

status quo and ignores the progress which we made last year. We would share many of the specific comments made on the draft resolution by Ambassador Eitel in his latest letter to Permanent Representatives. We therefore welcome the announcement by you, Mr. President, of the understanding that no action will be taken on draft resolution A/52/L.7 at this stage.

The challenge remains, however, for the majority to find a basis for a broadly supported decision. My delegation is only one of many which have shown flexibility and political will over the last few months to try to achieve this, and we are not about to abandon the effort. There is now a much greater understanding on all sides of the parameters within which a workable outcome can be reached, and we will continue to make every effort with like-minded countries to bring this necessary reform to early fruition. Indeed, we are encouraged by the fact that the political energy still invested in this discussion proves that, underneath it all, there is a widespread recognition that this reform is inevitable.

We hope therefore that we shall begin our work in the new year with determination, building on the progress made during the fifty-first session and with an eye to taking a decision on the size and shape of the Council before the end of this "Reform Assembly".

Mr. Eitel (Germany): For several weeks, many of us have been working to prepare for the discussion on agenda item 59. I am pleased that today offers another opportunity to make a couple of remarks on the issue. It is first and foremost here in the General Assembly that the important issues are and must be decided.

You, Mr. President, have prepared this debate carefully. You have consulted many delegations and have formed a common understanding about the way for our discussions to go forward and about their procedural result. You have acted with the authority and credibility inherent in the office of the President, and you deserve credit and applause. My delegation will do everything to respect and support your guidance.

The year 1997, especially the past few weeks, has been particularly dynamic as far as Security Council reform is concerned. It seems to me that procedural considerations, such as when and how the General Assembly should take a decision, have become more and more important and have been discussed almost more frequently than substance.

What precisely has happened since the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council started its work last January? First, we have witnessed the largest consultations in the history of the United Nations: the consultations of the co-Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group, Ambassador Breiterstein and Ambassador Jayanama, with 165 Member States, which led to major findings and clear majority views. Secondly, we have witnessed the presentation of the first full reform package, submitted by the former Chairman, Ambassador Razali. Thirdly, we have participated in the opening debate of the new session with Member States overwhelmingly focusing on United Nations and Security Council reform.

On these lines, I would like in my statement to focus on the following four main points: Germany as part of the mainstream; putting an end to self-centred discussions; the need for an agenda rather than an imposed time-frame; and faithful application of Article 108 of the Charter.

Six general debates, six agenda item debates and four Open-ended Working Group reports, with 48 annexes all together, have provided us with an extraordinary amount of statements, positions and proposals. Sometimes I feel as if we were like 185 pedestrians, looking for their way home in a big, rather dark, city with many unfamiliar streets, avenues and places. Many of us were lucky to find their way — they took what I will call the "Avenue of the Two Enlarged Categories". That Avenue is ample and straight, with enough space for everyone. I would like to see as many as possible of the pedestrians who are still in search of their way, join those who have started to walk down the "Avenue of the Two Enlarged Categories". This Avenue is spacious; it has two lanes. It is straight; there are no unnecessary detours. It is secure in spite of heavy traffic — hopefully, 24 members of an enlarged Council. It has enough sidewalk space. It is easy to look down because it is transparent. And it is easy to maintain — the next overhaul, by a review, is already scheduled.

In my view, both the former Chairman and the co-Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group have made it clear in their papers annexed to the last report that their assessment of the views of 165 Member States go in that direction. One of the main findings was that a very large majority supported an increase in both categories — permanent and non-permanent — with a

At that time, the Security Council adopted resolution 1073 (1996), in which it condemned these provocative acts. At that meeting of the Security Council, which took place during the session of the General Assembly, the Foreign Ministers of the permanent members of the Security Council, along with other Ministers of the Member States of the United Nations took part in the Security Council's discussions.

America's position remains hesitant. It is not playing its role effectively as a sponsor of the peace process. The parties concerned have accepted the initiative put forward by a former American President, Mr. George Bush, in 1991, and the Madrid Peace Conference was convened on the basis of the land-for-peace formula and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied Arab and Palestinian territories that were occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which relates to withdrawal from Southern Lebanon.

But, as usual, the Israeli Government turned its back completely on the resolutions of the Security Council and on all the other accords and obligations. The United States was supposed to play a vital and active role in reviving the peace process and bringing pressure to bear on Israel, utilizing its special means. That gave Israel valuable time in which to confiscate more Palestinian land, build more Israeli settlements, tighten its blockade against the Palestinian people, economically and militarily, and paralyse the movement of the Palestinian citizens.

The Israeli blockade prevents Palestinian citizens from moving, hampers the transfer of goods and the movement of the populace within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and between them, prevents entry and departure to and from the Palestinian territories, erects checkpoints, and isolates towns and villages, preventing the population from moving between them. Such measures have led to a severe shortage of primary materials and foodstuffs, resulting in economic paralysis. They have also raised the rate of unemployment to about 65 per cent and had a serious adverse impact on national and foreign investments, which have declined substantially.

Moreover, the Israeli Government has withheld tax revenues which it collected from Palestinian citizens, and which are due to the Palestinian National Authority. This was substantiated by the report of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, of 26 June 1997 (A/ES-10/6).

At the same time, Israel has backtracked from the agreement that was reached on the return of displaced Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip who were expelled as a result of the aggression committed in 1967. The total number of these displaced persons is no less than 750,000. That commitment should have been implemented, in pursuance of Security Council resolution 237 (1967), as well as under the 1993 Declaration of Principles. Israel also continues to deny to those refugees who were ejected from Palestine in 1948 their right to return to their homes under General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

Here it should be kept in mind that Israel was born in the United Nations under General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947 and did not emerge through history. That partition resolution was a birth certificate not only for Israel but also for an independent Arab State of Palestine. In this context, it is very bizarre that today we hear the current Israeli Prime Minister threatening to annex Palestinian territory if the Palestine Organization were to declare an independent State of Palestine.

Four years have elapsed, and Israel continues to prevaricate and is engaged in an exercise of subterfuge and circumvention in its interpretation of the provisions of the accords and agreements that were reached. It continues to Judaize more and more Palestinian territory through the confiscation of Palestinian land, the building of more and more settlements and the tightening of the siege imposed upon the Palestinian Authority, in order to cripple its effectiveness and obstruct the path of the Palestinian people with a view to denying them their right to exercise sovereignty over their national territory and resources.

Israel denies the Palestinian people their national rights, and is engaged in intensive efforts to perpetuate the settler presence on Palestinian territories and increase the number of settlements and settlers constantly. The objective is to make the Israeli settlements not only difficult, but impossible, to dismantle in accordance with Security Council resolution 465 (1980), which, by a unanimous vote, called for their dismantlement. Successive Security Council resolutions have emphasized that Israeli policies and practices of building settlements are illegal and are serious impediments to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace. Furthermore, they contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 as well as international law. The Security Council went even further than that. Resolution 465 (1980), unanimously adopted by the Security Council

in March 1980, called on Israel to dismantle the Israeli settlements that were in existence at that time.

Since then we have noted a regression in the position of the United States of America. The United States took no action beyond pro forma protests regarding Israel's settlement activity. Indeed, on certain occasions, the United States allowed Israel to complete construction activities in some settlements, even though perceiving in those settlements an obstacle to peaceful settlement and a factor that complicates the peace process.

We have noticed recently that the United States, regrettably, has started to look at the issue from an Israeli perspective. It has stated that the United Nations no longer has a role to play in the questions pertaining to a peaceful, political settlement such as of Israeli settlements, Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees and Palestinian sovereignty.

Most recently, the United States exercised its veto twice in one week in the Security Council, in order to prevent the Council from undertaking its responsibilities. That action by the United States led to the convening of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, the first in 15 years. I wish to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those Member States which supported the convening of that special session and voted in favour of the important resolutions it adopted. We continue to hope that those resolutions will be implemented.

By backtracking on the accords that have been reached, Israel deliberately seeks to tighten its control and hegemony over Palestinian land and resources in order to continue its settlement activity without hindrance. Israel has built bypass roads linking the Israeli settlements, of which there are now 183 in the West Bank. These bypass roads do not run through Palestinian villages, but around them. Indeed, they are a siege against those Palestinian villages and towns. Israel uses those bypass roads for its military and security purposes, thereby managing to isolate the Palestinian villages and towns and cut them off from each other, creating for them severe economic, social and security problems.

This is an accurate account of developments in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiating track. As to the other tracks, namely the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese, these are still frozen. But more serious than that, the Israeli Government is now scheming against those two sister countries. The Israeli army is committing repeated acts of aggression against sister Lebanon, creating scores of civilian casualties and destroying the country's vital centres. Yet Israel claims that it is prepared to withdraw first from southern Lebanon and then expresses its wish for peace while continuing to commit acts of aggression against Lebanon.

Facts and events show that the peace process in the Middle East is at an impasse owing to the behaviour of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and his political group and the provocative measures taken by that country. As a sponsor of the peace process, the United States should have played its role in reviving the peace process. The situation today requires a reaffirmation by the United Nations of its permanent responsibilities with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security and in ensuring the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council calling for Israel to withdraw from all territories occupied since 1967 so that the cycle of violence and tension will not recur, particularly given the disappearance of confidence between the parties to the conflict.

The United Nations has previously taken practical measures to address numerous international problems. Is it not now time for the Organization to take concrete steps to preserve the peace, to halt the deterioration of the security situation in the region, and to preserve and revitalize the peace process on the basis of the principles set forth at the Madrid Conference? Israel's persistence in its approach makes it impossible to achieve success in political negotiations or to reach a solution which would keep peace and security in the region. The perpetuation of Israeli occupation and its continuation of settlement activities inevitably doom the peace process, which demands first and foremost Israel's withdrawal from all Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. Israel must also dismantle the Israeli settlements. Unless those things are accomplished, the entire region of the Middle East will continue to be vulnerable to explosions and successive wars.

There is no doubt that the decision by the Arab States to suspend the normalization of relations with Israel and to stay away from meetings of the various multilateral commissions, as well as the absence of most of the Arab States from the recent economic forum in Doha, Qatar, are definite evidence of the loss of confidence in the success of the peace process.

The requirements of peace and security call for all Member States to respect Security Council resolutions

and to commit to their implementation so that the United Nations may remain an effective mechanism for addressing regional problems by peaceful means. However, we see that some Powers are acting according to a double standard and that they exempt Israel from compliance with United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions, even though that country is the party that threatens peace and security in the region thanks to its possession of weapons of mass destruction and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons while continuing to impede the peace process, freezing it.

The continued sanctions against Iraq, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Sudan have begun to raise questions in world public opinion about the duration of such sanctions. Is it not time that such unjust sanctions be lifted and that conditions be created that could bring relief to the Iraqi population, so that Iraqi children might have the basic life requirements of foodstuffs and medical supplies and the country have a chance to return to international life as an effective member of the world community?

We look forward to the full implementation of United Nations resolutions, especially those adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, including those regarding the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 in order to examine the necessary coercive measures to be adopted to ensure respect for that Convention and the implementation of its provisions in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 by Israel, including Jerusalem.

We also hope that at this session the General Assembly will endorse the full participation of Palestine in the proceedings of the United Nations and ensure that participation by Israel in those proceedings is in line with the provisions of international law and those of the Fourth Geneva Convention with regard to the Arab territories occupied since 1967, especially with regard to Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan.

We stand for comprehensive and lasting peace based on the principles of the Madrid Conference and in keeping with the provisions of United Nations Charter and its resolutions. However, we reject surrender to faits accomplis or the recognition of illegal de facto conditions created on the ground by Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories. We shall resist that injustice and aggression on the basis of our right to existence and to self-determination as a nation that has lived on that land for thousands of years and established there its glorious civilization.

Mr. Wolzfeld (Luxembourg) (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the associated country Cyprus, as well as Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The Middle East Peace Process has reached a worrying impasse. The conclusion in January 1997 of the protocol concerning the redeployment in Hebron kindled hopes of a renewal of trust between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government and hopes that this renewed trust would create a climate conducive to further fruitful negotiations. The construction of a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim/Har Homa unfortunately put an end to this encouraging perspective.

Terrorist acts, for which there can be no justification, have further compromised the trust between the parties and aggravated the crisis in the peace talks.

The European Union calls on the parties to resume political dialogue, to continue the negotiations in order to make progress on the implementation of the Interim Agreement and the Hebron protocol, and to resume the final status talks. It is therefore vital to refrain from any unilateral action that would prejudge questions relating to the final status and to restore on a lasting basis full and complete cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

The European Union strongly reaffirms that peace in the Middle East is a question of fundamental importance to it. It will continue its efforts to support the peace process through the relations of friendship and trust that it enjoys with the various parties by intensifying its commitment at the diplomatic level, including through its special envoy for the Middle East peace process, Ambassador Moratinos, as well as its economic commitment in the region.

Thus, the President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, Mr. Jacques F. Poos, visited the region from 11 to 14 November 1997. On this occasion, he reaffirmed to his Middle East partners the Union's commitment to working to assist the current peace efforts.

In this context, the President of the Council argued in favour of implementing confidence-building measures, such as the opening of the Gaza airport, the construction of a port and free passage for Palestinians between Gaza and the West Bank. He also insisted on the need to finalize a code of good conduct between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. He also repeated the European Union's view that, important as such confidence-building measures may be, they should not obscure the real priorities of the peace process, namely the implementation of the agreed peace accords concerning the withdrawal of Israeli troops, as well as the fight against terrorism and the opening of the final status talks.

In addition to these political efforts, the European Union has undertaken to provide substantial funding to promote the economic and social development of the Palestinian population. Thus, the Union remains the major donor of funds to the Palestinians. We have pledged ECU 500 million in aid for the period from 1994 to 1999. In 1997, a package of ECU 50 million was specifically allocated to education and the media and to technical assistance to the municipalities and the Palestinian Legislative Council. Finally, ECU 4 million have been made available to the Palestinian Authority in order to meet its immediate needs on account of Israel's withholding of fiscal revenues due.

There is no alternative to the peace process launched in Madrid and Oslo. The European Union calls on the peoples and Governments of the region to regain the spirit of mutual trust that kindled the hope of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, which would make it possible to resolve the question of Palestine and of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): At the outset let me announce that Bangladesh has become one of the sponsors of three draft resolutions, A/52/L.49, L.50 and L.51, that are now being circulated on this question.

Bangladesh is deeply appreciative of the substantive report on the question of Palestine submitted by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in document A/52/35. We commend the good work being done by this 23-member Committee as the organ of the General Assembly dealing with the question of Palestine. Bangladesh has had the honour of attending its sessions as an observer on a regular basis. We also pay tribute to Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal for his leadership as the Chairman of the Committee. The report reminds the international community how much work still needs to be done — notwithstanding so many resolutions, United Nations sessions and international conferences — to bring about a just resolution of the Palestine question and, thus, achieve a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The year 1997 marks three decades that Israel has occupied the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and other Arab territories. It is also the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the intifadah, the Palestinian uprising that helped create the conditions for the peace process. Bangladesh therefore underscores the need to redouble this year our efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East by establishing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Like the Palestinian Rights Committee, we are extremely concerned and anguished that the hopes ushered in by initial positive developments in the region are not being realized, leaving the peace process increasingly in jeopardy and, at the same time, causing an alarming exacerbation of tension and violence on the ground.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is a matter of grave concern to the international community. It is indeed unfortunate that the Israeli authorities have — in defiance of all United Nations resolutions and in flagrant violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people — continued to pursue repressive policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. The United Nations has stressed the need to preserve the territorial integrity of all the occupied Palestinian territory and to guarantee the freedom of movement of persons and goods in the territory, including the removal of restrictions on movement into and from East Jerusalem, and the freedom of movement to and from the outside world. The United Nations has also demanded immediate and full cessation of construction in Jebel Abu Ghneim and of all other Israeli settlement activities, as well as of all illegal measures and actions in Jerusalem.

Regrettably, Israel has not heeded this demand and has, in fact, continued with such illegal measures and actions, including violating the territorial integrity of the Palestinian territory and imposing restrictions on the freedom of movement of persons and goods. Bangladesh believes that the harsh economic measures imposed against the occupied Palestinian territory, including the prolonged blockade, are a form of collective punishment, in contravention of international law and the agreements reached.

Bangladesh, which is committed by its Constitution to supporting oppressed peoples throughout the world, has consistently expressed strong solidarity with our Palestinian brethren, always and everywhere, in particular at the United Nations and in all major international forums. We reiterate our strong condemnation of Israel's policy of systematic violation of international humanitarian law, as well as fundamental freedoms and basic human rights, in the occupied territories. In her message on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People this year on 29 November, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that:

> "We reiterate our appeal for ensuring the applicability of the relevant Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories so that the dignity of the Palestinian people is no more assailed, so that no Palestinian is subjected to humiliation or degrading treatment, so that they receive the protection provided by international law."

My delegation would like to stress the necessity for commitment to the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, and the need for immediate and scrupulous implementation of the agreement reached between the parties, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from the West Bank and the commencement of negotiations on the final settlement. Bangladesh joins others in calling for a reinjection of momentum into the stalled Middle East peace process. We call upon the concerned parties, the sponsors of the peace process and other international parties, as well as the entire international community, to undertake all the necessary efforts and initiatives to bring the peace process back on track and to ensure its continuity and success.

Bangladesh believes that, in the interest of restoring mutual confidence and promoting peace, it is absolutely necessary to end all illegal measures and actions by Israel. It cannot be overemphasized that the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict will constitute a significant contribution to strengthening international peace, security and progress. We urge all concerned to ensure that the peace accords are complied with fully and negotiations with the Palestinian Authority pursued in a congenial atmosphere. The peace process can be effectively advanced by the withdrawal of all troops from the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, stopping settlement in those areas with immediate effect, and allowing the Palestinian diaspora to return with full dignity to its homeland. It is also essential that the international community be forthcoming in fulfilling its commitment to supporting the peace process by extending economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people during the interim period.

My delegation strongly supports the call voiced by delegations for conferring upon Palestine the same rights and privileges of participation, except voting rights and candidatures, as those conferred upon States Members of the United Nations in the sessions and work of the General Assembly and in the international conferences convened under the auspices of the Assembly or other organs of the United Nations. We also strongly support the Palestinian rights Committee's view that the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat continues to make a useful and constructive contribution to the dissemination of information on all issues pertaining to the question of Palestine. We request the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources to enable it to perform its task and to cover adequately the various aspects of the question of Palestine, including the project for the training of staff of the Palestinian Authority.

In conclusion, Bangladesh reaffirms that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts.

Mr. Wibisono (Indonesia): The General Assembly is considering the question of Palestine at a critical moment in the history of the Middle East region, for the peace process which began in 1991, generating great hopes and expectations that a durable and lasting peace was within reach — especially one that included the exercise by the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination and independence — has been jeopardized. The region now stands dangerously close to becoming embroiled in tension and turmoil. The continuing ordeal of the Palestinians, as well as the deteriorating situation on the ground, are well chronicled in the report to the Assembly of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Allow me at this juncture to commend Ambassador Ibra Ka, whose dedicated service and dynamic stewardship of the Committee — of which Indonesia takes pride in having been a member since its inception — has helped to mobilize global opinion at this

critical stage of the peace process to the just cause of the Palestinian people.

The past year has been marked by increasing tension, which has been exacerbated by a stalemate in the peace process. The tragedies of the past risk being reenacted and the spirit of peace and harmony appears to be fading into the distance. We had earnestly hoped, along with the rest of the international community, that the peace accords that were so scrupulously and painstakingly negotiated would be implemented in good faith. Instead, we are confronted with a retreat from those very fundamental principles of the peace process, a defiant refusal by the Government of Israel to honour its legal obligations and commitments, and an audacious attempt unilaterally to abrogate the peace accords. These actions are contrary to all acceptable norms of international relations and an affront to the principles of justice.

Meanwhile, it is appalling that the Israeli authorities have embarked on perpetuating policies which can only have untold and disastrous consequences. Foremost of these is the expansion of settlements in and around Jebel Abu Ghneim, compounded by other untenable actions, such as the demolition of properties, closures, and the denial of residency rights to Palestinians in Jerusalem by the confiscation of documents. These acts have not only dealt a serious blow to the peace process, but have inflamed passions in the occupied territories and throughout the world.

It was in this overriding context that the international community, through the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which has been convened three times over the past year, expressed its unequivocal condemnation of Israel's settlement activities in Jebel Abu Ghneim, to the south of occupied East Jerusalem, as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, international law and other relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Clearly, the Government of Israel cannot hide under the flimsy pretext of security considerations to justify its untenable actions against an entire people, nor can it rationalize its acts of intimidation and practices of repression and persecution. Such ill-conceived policies do not bode well for a stable peace in the region and entail even greater ramifications for the world at large. It would mark a return to aggression and be an assault on peace, for peace and security are intertwined and cannot exist on the basis of the usurpation of the basic rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the Government of Israel must be urged to implement its legal commitments with consistency and fairness. Only in this way can a climate of mutual trust and confidence be fostered, enabling the parties to resume negotiations on the remaining issues and thereby paving the way to genuine peace.

It is self-evident that a difficult road lies ahead in surmounting the decades of occupation and injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people, which have gravely undermined the socio-economic fabric of their society. In this regard, we believe that the United Nations and its agencies have a central role to play in alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people, and also in assisting in carrying out the formidable and challenging tasks of nation-building. We are therefore gratified by the appointment of Ambassador Chinmaya R. Gharekhan as the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, to serve as the focal point of the efforts of the Organization, as well as to maintain contact with the donor community and other non-governmental organizations in this field.

It was five decades ago that the General Assembly was seized of the question of Palestine with the adoption of resolution 181 (II). Throughout these long and arduous years, more time and effort has been expended on the question of Palestine than on any other international problem. Yet this question remains on our agenda. Without a shadow of a doubt, a durable and just solution to this intractable problem can be attained only if the Palestinian people are allowed to regain their legitimate national rights — including the right to return to their own independent homeland — based on the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

For its part, Indonesia will continue to give unswerving support to the valiant Palestinian people. It has consistently maintained the Palestinian national cause as a matter consonant with the fundamental principles and purposes enshrined in its own Constitution. It was therefore most gratifying for Indonesia to host the Asian seminar and non-governmental organization symposium on achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, held in Jakarta from 4 to 7 May 1997, which provided an appropriate forum to explore all avenues which would lead to a comprehensive and just settlement to the question of Palestine.

Standing at the threshold of the next century, we fervently hope that peace will be permanently anchored in the Middle East and that a displaced people who have

known nothing but frustration and bitterness, deprivation and denial, will finally emerge triumphant.

Mr. Diatta (Niger) (*interpretation from French*): First of all, I would like to express, on behalf of my delegation, my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the clear and comprehensive report on the question of Palestine which each has submitted.

In the light of events during the past year, we can affirm that progress on this question has not met the expectations of the international community. In fact, the peace process on which it had placed so much hope has been at an impasse for several months now.

The serious setback sustained by the peace process is undoubtedly the result of the unilateral decision of the Israeli Government to build a new settlement in occupied East Jerusalem, in flagrant violation of agreements concluded. This unfortunate decision has plunged the entire region of the Middle East — and in particular the occupied Palestinian territory — into an alarming political situation characterized in particular by an escalation of violence on the ground and, above all, by numerous losses of human lives, both Palestinian and Israeli.

The prevailing situation of confrontation is all the more regrettable since the bilateral negotiations which were begun in order to implement the agreements were at a critical phase regarding the final status of the Palestinian territories.

Such an atmosphere, along with the fact that the Security Council has twice been prevented from taking the necessary measures to deal with this issue, led the international community — represented by the General Assembly — to hold an emergency special session, in accordance with its responsibilities under the Charter. However, despite the adoption by an overwhelming majority of Member States, of resolutions ES-10/2 and ES-10/3, which, among other things, demanded that Israel renounce all illegal measures and activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, the political situation and security have continued to deteriorate as a result of the Israeli Government's non-compliance with the provisions of those resolutions and the Oslo agreements.

This is why public opinion throughout the world has been perturbed by the Israeli policy and practices in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, policy and practices which threaten to plunge the Middle East region into a new period of conflict unless we take care to prevent it. Even in Israel, more and more voices are raised to demand the relaunching of the peace process and to express their disappointment, even frustration, concerning the illegal measures taken by Israel.

The popular rally organized in Tel Aviv last 8 November, at the very site of the assassination of one of the great architects of the peace process, former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, is the most striking illustration of this. Moreover, this general mobilization for peace was unanimously acknowledged to have been the greatest gathering in the history of Israel.

My delegation therefore shares the point of view expressed by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People when it affirms in its report that it is

> "essential for the international community to intensify its efforts in support of the historic process of reconciliation between the two sides and for the effective implementation of the agreements reached and for the resumption of all aspects of the negotiations on the agreed basis." (A/52/35, para. 125)

Our General Assembly must shoulder this task, as it has been given a permanent responsibility regarding the question of Palestine until it is settled in all its aspects.

My delegation calls on the parties concerned to re-establish an ongoing dialogue and resume their cooperation to change the current alarming situation and make progress in the effective implementation of the agreements reached, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace.

Indeed, as we know, peace is an endeavour based on mutual trust and requiring behaviour which will lead to an atmosphere of calm. Therefore, my delegation particularly urges the Israeli Government to once and for all renounce all the illegal measures it has taken, since these are endangering the Middle East peace process. Only in this way can a new opportunity be given to the peace that the international community so ardently hopes to see.

Before concluding my statement, I should like to reiterate to the Assembly the conviction of the people and Government of Niger that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East hinges on the necessary exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to establish an independent State, and on scrupulous respect of the relevant United Nations resolutions as well as of the obligations enshrined in agreements already concluded.

Niger will spare no effort to ensure the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The President: Before I give the floor to the next speaker, I should like to inform members that in connection with the item under consideration, five draft resolutions, contained in documents A/52/L.49 through A/52/L.53, have just been distributed to delegations in the Hall.

Mr. Qin Huasun (China) (*interpretation from Chinese*): In the six years that have elapsed since the Madrid Conference, the Middle East peace process has made important headway thanks to the joint efforts of Palestine and Israel and the extensive support of the international community. Earlier this year, Palestine and Israel reached an agreement on the question of Hebron, which advanced the self-rule process of the Palestinian people another step forward. However, the insistence of the Israeli side on building Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem has led to serious difficulties in the Middle East peace process, to the suspension of Palestine-Israel peace talks and to the escalation of terrorist violence. The international community is deeply concerned and disturbed by this situation.

The question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East question. The suffering of the Palestinian people over the past 50 years has elicited broad concern and sympathy from the international community. Only a comprehensive, just and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine and the restoration to the Palestinian people of all their legitimate national rights, including the right to establish an independent State, can bring about genuine and lasting peace in the region.

The history of the Middle East over the past decades, and particularly the developments in the Middle East peace process in recent years, have proved that the countries in the region can enjoy real security and promote regional economic cooperation and common development only when there is a comprehensive and just peace. To this end, we call on Israel to stop building Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem, and we hope that all parties concerned will continue to take a flexible and pragmatic approach, strictly observe and implement the agreements already reached, fulfil in real earnest their obligations, remove obstructions and resume talks at an early date on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, so as to push the peace process forward.

For historical reasons and as a result of the continued closure and sanctions, people's lives and the economy in the areas of Palestinian self-rule have faced many difficulties since the start of that self-rule; this has seriously hindered development. The Israeli side should refrain from enforcing closure in the self-rule areas and from freezing Palestinian assets at will. The international community should also provide greater support and assistance for the Palestinian people. In this connection, developed countries should undertake additional obligations and honour at an early date the commitments already entered into so as to facilitate an early economic recovery and development in the areas of Palestinian self-rule.

In recent years, the United Nations has played an increasingly important role in resolving regional conflicts and in the maintenance of international peace, and it has made contributions to the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the question of the Middle East as a whole. Since the beginning of this year, the General Assembly has convened its tenth emergency special session and two resumed sessions on the question of Palestine and adopted relevant resolutions; for this we wish to express our appreciation. We hope and believe that the United Nations will play an even greater positive role in advancing the Middle East peace process and ultimately bringing about a comprehensive, fair and reasonable settlement of the question of Palestine and the Middle East question.

The Chinese Government and people are very much concerned about the developments in the Middle East region. We have consistently supported the just cause of the Palestinian people and contributed to promoting the Middle East peace process. We are of the view that peace and stability in the Middle East region accord with the fundamental interests of the peoples in the region and contribute to peace and development in the world as a whole. We will, as always, work untiringly with the international community for peace and stability in the region. China has already provided, and will continue to

provide, assistance, to extent of its ability, to the Palestinian people through various channels and contribute its share to the economic development of the areas of Palestinian self-rule.

Mr. Gold (Israel): In the last four years, the people of Israel have witnessed two contrasting realities in their pursuit of peace with the Palestinians. True, there were a stunning series of diplomatic breakthroughs between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), followed by a peace treaty with Jordan and a web of new relationships with a half-dozen Arab States. Israelis were filled with hope that at long last their state of siege had ended and that they could look forward to an era of normalcy and safety.

But the people of Israel witnessed another reality as well. From the 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO until the May 1996 election of the current Israeli Government, nearly 250 Israelis died in an unprecedented wave of Palestinian terrorism aimed at the heart of Israel's cities and in their vicinity: in Afula, Hadera, Beit-Lid, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Indeed, more Israelis died in these three years from such attacks than in the previous decade. During 1997, while the frequency of these attacks was reduced, the bombings continued nonetheless in the Mahane Yehuda market and the Ben Yehuda pedestrian mall in Jerusalem.

Israel had known terrorism before, but these cases reflected a completely different situation. These were not occasional knifings or individual drive-by shootings, but highly lethal suicide bombings backed by a vast and expanding organizational infrastructure. It recruited and trained personnel, manufactured and stockpiled weapons materials, and commanded and financed elaborate operations. Military-grade explosives, which had not been used in such attacks in more than 10 years, were suddenly available in large quantities, with devastating results. But whether belonging to the Izz el-Deen al-Qassam units of the Hamas or to the Islamic Jihad, this organizational infrastructure was growing in the very same territories that had been given over to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority of Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Today there is a common misconception that the peace process was in an idyllic state until last year and has only just lately deteriorated. This is completely false. It is as false on the Palestinian negotiating track as it is on the Syrian track, where Israel went through two mini-wars in Lebanon and absorbed more than 200 Katyusha rocket strikes from Syrian-controlled territory in Lebanon. The fact is that the present Israeli Government inherited a peace process that was in a shambles because the core bargain of the Oslo agreements had been repeatedly violated: that Israel would address Palestinian aspirations by creating areas of Palestinian self-government and that the Palestinian Authority would assume responsibility for security in those very same areas. This bargain has not been kept. As a result, innocent Israelis have paid for this with their lives in brutal suicide bombing after suicide bombing in the heart of our cities.

The Government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had many options by which to contend with this mounting terror. Israel could have let despair and cynicism overtake diplomacy and could have declared that the peace process had failed. The Israeli Government rejected this option. The Government could have ignored the truth behind these assaults in our cities and blamed only distant adversaries, such as Iran. This would have failed to address the fact that the wave of terror attacks in Israel was emanating from areas under the military control of our negotiating partners. Only by insisting on their accountability could we save the lives of our people. Therefore we chose the option of making an impaired peace process work by adding principles of peacemaking that previously had been lacking.

This September, Israel's Foreign Minister, David Levy, stood before the General Assembly and suggested a code of conduct for strengthening negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The first principle of the code of conduct would state that violence is totally incompatible with peace and reconciliation. Removing violence from the negotiations means that the Palestinian fight against terrorism would be made constant, and not contingent upon the extent of Israeli concessions, as explicitly demanded by Colonel Jabril Rajub of the Palestinian Authority. Removing violence from negotiations means that Palestinian security services would quell street rioting in Bethlehem and Hebron instead of inciting it. Removing violence means that Chairman Arafat would give no green lights to Hamas to attack Israel, as occurred on 9 March 1997. Removing violence means that the masterminds of the 1996 Dizingoff Centre bombing in Tel Aviv would be prosecuted and imprisoned rather than be set free to organize new cells for attacking Israel, as is occurring today.

To make negotiations work, the code of conduct suggested moreover that the continuity of contacts between Israelis and Palestinians should be protected, and

not be disrupted for short-term gain. Normalization between Israel and the wider region, it was suggested, should not be halted, but should be increased. And our differences should be resolved in bilateral negotiations, not in international forums.

Beyond the code of conduct, Israel has insisted that the Oslo process be based on the principle of reciprocity. On 15 January 1997, at the signing of the Hebron Protocol, both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Chairman Yasser Arafat specifically committed themselves to implement their mutual obligations on the basis of reciprocity in the Note for the Record that was signed by the United States peace coordinator, Ambassador Dennis Ross. To this day, while parts of the international community want to place ever-mounting pressure on Israel to move on with the peace process, not a single Palestinian commitment that appears in that document has been implemented: the revision of the Palestinian Covenant calling for Israel's destruction remains incomplete; illegal firearms have not been collected; the language of incitement continues; not a single terrorist has been extradited; and, most important, the organizational infrastructure of terrorism remains intact within the areas of the Palestinian Authority. And this is only a partial list.

What is Israel supposed to do under such circumstances? Must Israel continue to pull back without getting anything in return? Israel redeployed in Hebron; it freed prisoners; it offered last March a first stage of further redeployment that would have tripled the "A" area of full Palestinian control from 2.8 per cent of the West Bank, which had been turned over by Israel's previous Government, to 10.1 per cent of the West Bank. These are all tangible acts and not just atmospherics or words. Israel is now proposing a second further redeployment; it is only seeking that the infrastructure of terrorism be finally dismantled and that it not just spill over automatically into any new areas that are handed over to Palestinian control. Israel has reengaged in negotiations on the airport, seaport and safe passage; Israel lifted closure, more than doubling the number of Palestinian workers earning their living from the Israeli economy. Israel has complied with its commitments under the Interim Agreement; the Palestinian Authority has not. Where is the reciprocity that was specifically adopted in the Note for the Record and in the United States and European side letters to Israeli and Palestinian leaders?

What stands behind the misconception nonetheless that Israel has not complied? Palestinian spokesmen point to settlement activity, knowing full well that settlement growth is no more a violation of the Oslo agreements than the natural growth of Palestinian towns and villages. Palestinian spokesmen point to our building in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Israel, knowing that Oslo left Jerusalem under Israeli jurisdiction. Palestinian spokesmen point to our offer of further redeployment as inadequate, yet they know full well that according to Oslo further redeployment is unilaterally decided and executed by Israel. Indeed, in January 1997, in the Note for the Record, Palestinian negotiators such as Mahmoud Abbas — Abu Mazen — and Saeb Erekat termed further redeployment as an issue for implementation by Israel and not as an issue for negotiation between the parties.

Chairman Arafat signed the Oslo II Interim Agreement in Washington on 28 September 1995 knowing full well that his negotiators had failed in their attempts to achieve a one-sided construction freeze on Israel building. Indeed, our late Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, confirmed this fact when he stated one week later, as Oslo II was ratified in the Knesset, that

> "We made a commitment to the Knesset not to uproot any settlement in the framework of the Interim Agreement or to freeze construction and natural growth".

Chairman Arafat signed the Interim Agreement knowing that it left it up to Israel alone to decide the size of a credible further redeployment. What is happening today is that Israel is being asked to make new concessions that go beyond the Oslo agreements in order to win Palestinian compliance with security responsibilities that are within the Oslo agreements. Rather than facing sanction for its adoption of violence, the Palestinian Authority is expecting to be rewarded.

Despite all the difficulties and risks involved, the Government of Israel is determined to make this peace process work. Rather than become mired in the nuances of the Interim Agreement, Israel has recommended that the parties quickly enter and accelerate their negotiations over permanent status. To achieve success in these negotiations, both Israelis and Palestinians will have to adjust their expectations. Israel has begun to adjust its expectations in accordance with Palestinian aspirations; the Palestinians need to adjust their expectations in accordance with Israeli interests and concerns.

For diplomacy must take into account the true context of Israel's situation. Fifty years ago, the General Assembly adopted the majority report of the United

Nations Special Committee on Palestine and adopted a resolution calling for partition and the creation of a Jewish State. Within a half a year, the State of Israel was declared — but it was promptly invaded by the armies of five Arab States that rejected out of hand the General Assembly resolution. From that time onward, no one could talk about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in isolation from this broader context; Israelis and Palestinians are not located on an island in the Indian Ocean. As a result, any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must not rob Israel of its capacity for self-defence in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

That imperative became clear again when Israel faced a broad coalition of armies that had massed their forces on our armistice lines during the months of May and early June 1967. In the Six Day War that ensued, Israel came into control of the West Bank and became determined never to return to the vulnerable 1967 lines that had invited aggression. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) recognized that need in its call for "secure and recognized boundaries" and its rejection of full Israeli withdrawal from all the new territories that were placed under Israeli administration.

Israel's quest for secure borders against potential adversarial coalitions remains a vital necessity. New factors in military strategy have not altered these considerations. The 1991 Gulf War demonstrated that wars in the Middle East are not decided by ballistic missile barrages, but by the movement of conventional land armies. In any case, Middle East defence resources in the 1990s are still being poured into ground force modernization, into armour and self-propelled artillery. Increasingly, the slow-moving infantry formations of 30 years ago have been replaced throughout the region with rapid armoured and mechanized divisions. This qualitative shift has transpired not only in Syria but also in Iraq, which historically has dispatched large expeditionary forces against Israel, in 1948, in 1967 and again in 1973. Indeed, the combined divisional strength poised to Israel's east rivals the power once aimed at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization by the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe at the height of the cold war.

The West Bank has served as a formidable barrier protecting Israel's densely populated coastal plane from conventional military attack. Its 3,000-foot north-south hill ridge is set against an area that is 1,200 feet below sea level, thereby creating a 4,200-foot incline for any attacking army. Israeli deployments along its sparsely populated eastern slopes, and the routes of access for their reinforcement, have become the front line of Israel's defence in the east. And given the three-minute flight time from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea for combat aircraft, the West Bank's airspace and hilltops remain critical components of Israel's air defence. These considerations of topography, space and time become all the more important with the asymmetry between Israel's own small standing army, which requires reserve reinforcement, and the huge standing armies that are arrayed to its east.

Addressing Palestinian claims can help modify the intentions of some of the Arab States to Israel's east. But no stable arrangement can be structured in the long term if it addresses intentions alone, without taking into account these regional military capabilities. It is possible to reach a permanent status solution between Israel and the Palestinians that fully takes into account Israel's vital needs for its self-defence. This will require both flexibility and creativity; it will also require new political thinking. Israel and the Palestinians must find a third way between unbridled Palestinian self-determination and the past record of Israeli military control.

Across the world today — from Ireland to Bosnia, from Afghanistan to Angola — the State system is threatened by dozens of ethno-religious conflicts. Should the principle of unbridled self-determination be applied in every case, the world we know of approximately 185 States will quickly turn into a world of 300 States, in which every tribe and linguistic group seeks independence. This development will not only lead to increasing instability in the Middle East, it will also become the main cause of strategic instability across the entire globe.

Forty years after the demise of the European colonial empires, it is imperative that the world find a balance between the free expression of peoples' national aspirations and the requirements of international security in the twenty-first century. For the world has moved from an era in which decolonization was the primary international concern to an era having to contend with global "Lebanonization".

The "question of Palestine", as it is called in the United Nations, today has implications that go well beyond the Middle East. In each of the difficult post-cold-war conflicts today, common features arise: illegal arms have not been confiscated, radio transmitters incite peoples to violence and direct and proxy terrorism is still a chosen instrument for winning political advantage. If these acts are not stopped by the Palestinian Authority in

our conflict, other regions will learn this lesson. If the systematic use of violence by the Palestinian Authority is rewarded with increased pressures for new Israeli concessions, then violence will come to undermine every process of reconciliation between peoples worldwide.

At the same time, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that addresses both Palestinian aspirations and Israeli needs can serve as a model for the entire world. Despite the disappointment that has grown in Israel in recent years, the hand of peace of all Israelis is extended to our Palestinian partners. The best way to surmount the present environment is for both parties to renew their dedication to resolve all outstanding differences peacefully, in direct, face-to-face negotiations. It is time to begin immediate negotiations on a permanent settlement. United Nations resolutions today that prejudge the outcome of these negotiations do not advance the parties one inch towards reaching peace. Such resolutions simply damage the peace process.

I call on the Member States of the United Nations, particularly Israel's old friends in Africa, Asia and South America, to encourage direct negotiations and to free themselves from mandatory bloc voting. The challenge between Israel and the Palestinians is great, but both peoples are capable of achieving the common purpose that was set out by our leaders four years ago.

Ms. Eshmambetova (Kyrgyzstan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mr. Marzuki (Malaysia): My delegation is seriously concerned about the current status of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which, having started off well following the signing of the Oslo accords, have since encountered a series of serious setbacks. Quite clearly, the disappointing lack of progress in these talks stems from the extreme, hard-line position adopted by the Netanyahu Government. Unilateral decisions and actions taken by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, are a clear manifestation of this hard-line approach and its lack of commitment to the full implementation of agreements signed with the Palestinians. This has resulted in the deterioration of the security situation in the area and placed the peace process in serious jeopardy.

Despite repeated calls by the international community to desist from its uncompromising policies, the Israeli Government continues to pursue these policies in violation of the Israeli-Palestinian accords. These policies include attempts to alter the status and demographic composition of Jerusalem, the confiscation of Palestinian lands and the demolition of Arab houses, as well as the continued delay in fully implementing the provisions of the Interim Agreement. Under the present Israeli Government there has been an unprecedented increase in settlement activities throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem. Since it assumed power in June 1996 the Government has authorized and encouraged the construction of some 19,000 housing units in existing Jewish settlements, as well as new settlements such as in Jebel Abu Ghneim, completely oblivious to international condemnation and in clear violation of the provisions of the Interim Agreement. What is clear is that this settlement policy is the culmination of an overall grand strategy which since 1967 has led to the confiscation of at least 70 per cent of the Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the construction of 38,500 housing units for the Israelis at the expense of the Palestinians. Indeed, as many as 2,300 houses belonging to the Palestinians have been demolished since 1967, and from January to early September 1997 alone, 100 Palestinian houses have been razed to the ground.

It is transparent that the policies being pursued by the Israeli Government with regard to the Arab residents in Jerusalem, including the demolition of their houses to make way for Jewish settlements, confiscation of their identity cards and other forms of harassment, as documented in document A/52/35, are motivated by the Israeli Government's agenda to change the demographic character of the city, designed to pre-empt the outcome of the permanent status talks on Jerusalem. While the furtherance of this policy is in clear violation of the Interim Agreement of 1993, it also contravenes Security Council resolutions 446 (1979) and 465 (1980), and in particular the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. These violations of international law compelled the General Assembly to convene the tenth emergency special session in April 1997, and to resume it twice, in July and October. Resolutions of that session have, *inter alia*, recommended that the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Convention convene a conference on measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and to ensure respect for the Convention, in accordance with common article 1.

The continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian Arab lands has seriously impacted on the Palestinian economy in the occupied territories. It has led to extreme hardship on the part of the Palestinian people as a whole, whose

freedom of movement has been severely restricted pursuant to Israel's policy of closure in many parts of the occupied territories. This has resulted in further deterioration of the Palestinian economy, characterized by continuing high unemployment and a significant decrease in real wages. In the Gaza Strip the unemployment rate is estimated at a depressing 50 to 60 per cent. In the last four years the annual income of Palestinians has dropped sharply, from $1,800 to $950 in the West Bank and from $1,200 to $600 in the Gaza Strip, forcing an increasing number of Palestinians to live in miserable slums amidst deplorable social, living and health conditions. The appalling situation which Palestinians in the occupied territories find themselves in are further aggravated by a rapidly deteriorating infrastructure, such as damaged roads, lack of clean water, inadequate housing and poor health services.

Given the plight of the Palestinian people under occupation, it remains the responsibility of the United Nations to provide much needed economic, social and other assistance pending the resolution of the question of Palestine. In this connection, my delegation wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the various United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for their admirable role and untiring involvement in alleviating the hardships faced by the Palestinians. UNRWA plays a leading role, especially in the fields of education, health, relief and social services, and its programmes are without doubt among the most laudable of the United Nations. My delegation is, however, concerned that UNWRA's budget shortfalls will seriously affect its activities. It is therefore critical for the international community to continue to provide adequate and predictable financing to UNRWA. For its part, Malaysia will continue to make its modest contribution beyond and above its bilateral assistance to Palestine, consistent with its continuing support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle for a homeland of their own.

Until the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestine issue, it is incumbent upon Israel, as a Member of this Organization, to abide by all relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the same time, Israel must faithfully commit itself to implementing the provisions of all agreements reached with the Palestinians in good faith and without delay. It must make every effort to refrain from taking actions which will undermine further the fragile framework of negotiations which has been put in place following the Oslo accords.

Unless and until a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is achieved, the international community cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the Middle East conflict, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Indeed, the international community must redouble its efforts to ensure Israel's full compliance with its international obligations.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset I should like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts in connection with the peace process in the Middle East. I should also like to express our gratitude to Ambassador Ibra Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee, for the report submitted to the General Assembly at this session.

Since the convening of the emergency Arab summit meeting in Cairo in June last year, and the crucial decisions adopted there, a spirit of optimism and determination had prevailed throughout the Arab homeland for pursuing the peace process on the basis of firm and serious foundations which would enable us to address the present grave challenges. The decisions adopted by the Arab summit came in response to the sensitive phase of the peace process. At the Cairo summit, the Arab leaders committed themselves at the Cairo summit to achieve a just and comprehensive peace as an irreversible strategic objective and option, to be pursued within the framework of international legality.

Despite this Arab position, a position which bolsters the principles of the peace process, the Israeli Government has ignored legitimate Arab rights and all the accords previously reached and has totally reneged on its obligations. Furthermore, the Israeli Government has adopted a policy of intensified suppression and oppression of the Palestinian people, the consolidation of its occupation of Arab territories occupied since 1967, and the pursuit of a practice of fait accompli.

The Committee, in its report contained in document A/52/35, expressed its increasing concern over the deterioration of the situation and the intensification of violence and tension in the occupied territories. The Committee also expressed its concern that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations faced serious setbacks owing to the position of the Government of Israel on the various aspects of the peace process. In this context, the Committee also expressed its deep concern for the lack

of respect by the Israeli side for the agreements already signed with the Palestinian counterparts.

The Arab States consider that Israel is responsible for impeding progress in the peace process and perhaps collapsing it entirely.

Here we have the international community, through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, attributing responsibility for this setback to the Israeli authorities. The Committee calls on Israel to return to the peace process and to submit to the will of the international community.

Israel's answer to the Arab States and the international community is to continue building more new settlements and to expand the existing ones, in both its declarations and its deeds.

Thus statements made by representatives of various Israeli Government agencies and what we have heard in the Israeli Knesset demonstrate that there is a relentless effort being made to preserve the presence of Jewish colonialist settlers and to reinforce that presence in the West Bank, including Arab East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Work is under way to construct a new settlement at Jebel Abu Ghneim in Jerusalem (Al-Quds Al-Sharif) despite the demands of the international community that Israel stop this construction. These calls were made at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, convened this year under the "Uniting for Peace" resolution, on the three occasions that it met.

The Israeli Ministry of Industry and Trade approved a $30 million programme to encourage investment in a number of settlements, including four in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli Ministry of Defence approved a plan for the construction of 1,550 housing units in the settlement of Givat Zeev, north of Jerusalem. The Knesset Finance Committee approved a special allocation of $16 million for the reinforcement of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Furthermore, the Israeli Ministry of the Treasury announced last May the allocation of $16.5 million for further development of Jewish settlements as part of the Israeli Government's decision to establish a special development centre for the settlements.

The Israeli authorities continue to pursue a policy of collective punishment in its various forms, from demolition of houses to mass expulsions and the imposition of a total blockade of the Palestinian territories.

From September 1993 — the signing of the peace accord — until now, the Israelis have demolished 270 houses in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Among these, there were 22 houses which were demolished during the time of the Labour Government. Since the Netanyahu Government took office, that is, from 29 May 1996 and up to 29 May 1997, 180 houses were demolished, and some 500 more houses are targeted for demolition in the near future. That is because the Israeli authorities demolish the houses of persons thought to have committed, or who are suspected of committing, what Israel calls security offenses — merely on suspicion — as can be seen from the international reports submitted to us.

The estimates provided to us by the United Nations indicate that the Palestinian gross national product in the occupied territories declined by 20 per cent between 1993 and the end of 1996, even though the World Bank expected that the Palestinian economy would grow by 4 per cent after the Oslo accords. Those estimates indicate that the rate of unemployment ranges between 40 and 45 per cent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The total loss suffered by the Palestinian economy during the period 1992 to 1996 amounted to $6 billion — all as a result of the continuing Israeli practices in regard to the strangulation of the Palestinian people, the imposition of the blockade, and the closure of Palestinian territories.

The report submitted to us in document A/52/35 states that Israel continued arbitrarily to impose closure in response to its alleged security needs and that the harsh retaliatory measures on the part of the Israeli Government would dangerously exacerbate the state of the Palestinian economy, resulting in greater hardship and despair among the Palestinian population.

The Israeli authorities pursue an arbitrary colonialist hegemonic policy in East Jerusalem, likened in the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories submitted to the General Assembly, contained in document A/52/131/Add.2, to a policy of "ethnic cleansing". Here I would like to quote from the report:

> "The gravity of the situation in East Jerusalem is compounded further by the recent withdrawal on a massive scale of identity cards of Palestinian

> Jerusalemites. Witnesses who testified before the Special Committee have described this policy as amounting to a silent deportation or even ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem's Arab population, who are being treated as resident aliens. It is estimated that some 60,000 to 80,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites, who have to prove that the City is their 'centre of their life', are threatened with losing their residency rights, which has given rise to a pervasive feeling of insecurity among the population. This discriminatory policy, applied to the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem ... has, among other things, serious repercussions for health insurance, education, housing and freedom of movement. None of these apply to Israelis." (A/52/131/Add.2, p. 5)

Moreover, Israel's policies regarding Jerusalem resulted in violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers, especially in the wake of the opening by Israel on 24 September 1996 of the so-called Western Wall Tunnel under the compound of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the first kiblah and the third holiest mosque in the Islamic world.

The international community should stand up to this Israeli challenge and intransigence, which are undermining the peace process in the Middle East. Arab acceptance of the principles of the peace process, anchored on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978), and on the principle of land for peace, in no way implies acceptance of the current Israeli practice of Judaizing occupied Arab territory by building new settlements and expanding the existing ones, or of the attempts to Judaize the holy Arab city of Jerusalem and to obliterate its Arab and Islamic physical character through a fait accompli policy.

The States which signed the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 are called upon to put pressure on Israel to implement the provisions of that Convention within the occupied Arab territories, including Holy Jerusalem.

The Government of Saudi Arabia, which is the custodian of the two holy mosques in Mecca and Medina, has accorded special, primordial importance to the peace process in the Middle East since its inception in Madrid, and throughout, until it reached the current crossroads. The Government of Saudi Arabia has provided all forms of assistance to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate their sufferings and help them fulfil their national aspirations in building their independent State on their national Palestinian soil. Along with Arab sister States, the Government of Saudi Arabia will continue to make its maximum efforts for the resumption of the peace process on all tracks, so that a just and lasting peace can be achieved in the Middle East, and so that the region may again enjoy the blessings bestowed upon it by God, the Almighty.

The international community, especially the two sponsors of the peace process in the Middle East, namely, the United States of America and the Russian Federation, as well as the European Union, is called upon to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli authorities to make them comply with the resolutions of international legality with regard to the question of Palestine and the Middle East peace process.

We maintain that the expeditious resumption of the peace process on all tracks through the effective implementation of the Oslo accords, especially the 34 accords signed by the Israeli and Palestinian sides, as well as the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace through full Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), are the viable road to ensuring the return of security to the region and its emergence from this state of freeze, tension and violence in order for the Middle East region to continue its rich contribution to the construction of world civilization.

I wish to close my remarks today by quoting from the Holy Koran:

> "On that account: We ordained
> For the Children of Israel
> That if any one slew
> A person — unless it be
> For murder for spreading
> Mischief in the land —
> It would be as if
> He slew the whole people:
> And if any one saved a life,
> It would be as if he saved
> The life of the whole people.
> Then although there came
> To them Our Apostles
> With Clear Signs, yet,
> Even after that, many
> Of them continued to commit
> Excesses in the land." [*The Holy Koran, V*]

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The General Assembly is considering this agenda item, "Question of Palestine", in the midst of special international and regional circumstances, characterized by the obvious frustration of the international community in general and the peoples of the Middle East in particular at the very dangerous impasse to which the peace track has come in the recent period.

The reason for this, as is known to all, is primarily the intransigent position adopted by the present Israeli Administration since its assumption of power. Indeed, the present Israeli Administration has endeavoured to undermine the bases of the peace process as a whole. To begin with, it has reneged on the primary principle on which the process, since the 1991 peace conference in Madrid, was based, namely, land for peace. In addition, the Israeli Administration has attempted to go back on its contractual commitments reached with the Palestinian side. Israel's negative position is characterized by a number of arbitrary and oppressive measures, such as its refusal to withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories, a measure that was clearly stipulated in all the agreements with the Palestinian National Authority. It has returned to a policy of Judaization and settlerism in Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, in total contradiction of the letter and spirit of the resolutions of the international community, particularly those of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

This Israeli political approach is also made clear by the repressive measures taken by this Israeli Administration against the Palestinian people, such as the confiscation of land of Palestinians, the expropriation of their properties by a variety of means, including the use of force and duplicitous methods, forced displacement and the provocation of Palestinians by settlers, which is encouraged. The Israeli Administration is also adopting policies of collective punishment of Palestinian citizens, such as the closing off of Palestinian land and the imposition of economic siege.

As a result of this unacceptable approach, the hopes generated by the peace process have completely come to an end, and the prospects of peace which the peoples of the region and other peace-loving peoples aspired to have vanished. Consequently the climate of doubt even with regard to the feasibility of some of the positive steps that were supposed to accompany the peace process, particularly the regional economic conferences and the multilateral coordination meetings, has prevailed. This is the logic of the saying: "if the root is gone, the branch is no more". The logic of confrontation and violence is overshadowing the whole region, and threatening the peace and stability of all its peoples.

The situation in occupied Palestine would not have reached the present deteriorated stage had the international community been firm and determined in putting an end to Israeli continued violations of the international resolutions with regard to the question of the Middle East in general and Palestine in particular. The inability of the Security Council to adopt a firm position with regard to these problems has led in one way or another to further transgressions by the Israeli Administration in pursuit of its objectionable policies. As a result, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly was reconvened twice this year, which is clear evidence of the awareness of the international community of the dangers of the situation and of the need to confront the intransigence pursued by the Israeli Administration and to force it to comply with international legality.

This position was also clearly expressed when the General Assembly adopted by overwhelming majority a decision to convene a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949.

The responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestinian people will remain as long as that people's case remains without a just and lasting solution that will guarantee their right to establish their own independent State with Holy Jerusalem as its capital. The solution to this problem, by its nature, must be part of a comprehensive and just solution to the Middle East question in its entirety. Any attempt to achieve just peace in the area must include the end of Israeli occupation in all Arab territories, including Holy Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 497 (1981) and 425 (1978). Algeria believes this is the only serious solution possible for the Israeli administration and that it would guarantee the return of Arab territories to their rightful owners, defuse the risk of war in the region and create a climate of confidence conducive to the establishment of a comprehensive, just, comprehensive and lasting peace that would ensure a peaceful life for all peoples of the region.

Mr. Samhan Al-Nuaimi (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, it is my pleasure to express

supporters. They now say they would adopt the Razali-framework draft resolution by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting — not by 124 votes, but by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting. It is common knowledge that whenever sensitive or very controversial issues are voted on here at the United Nations, more than a few countries act like Pontius Pilate: they wash their hands of the matter. They just abstain or happen not to be present at the crucial time. We checked, and we found that in the last couple of years, for example, at the moment of the vote on controversial draft resolutions, sometimes 40 or 50 delegations were not present. Moreover, a dozen or so Member States are not allowed to vote in the General Assembly, either for well-known reasons or because they have not paid their dues. In other words — and I want to draw attention to this because I think it is a crucial point — a reform of such relevance, of such magnitude as Security Council expansion could be approved by as few as 70, 80 or 90 votes, representing less than half the membership of the United Nations. This is what our opponents are asking. This is frankly unbelievable. It is unthinkable.

Turning to my third point, there can be little doubt that the only place where efforts can be made to bridge the sea of differences still existing on the issue of Security Council reform is within the Open-ended Working Group, in the light of day and for all to see. There, the Razali formula, with all its negative implications and consequences, can finally be put to rest once and for all. Two other major options should then be revisited and fully analysed in the Working Group, namely, rotation and/or increase only in non-permanent seats along the lines of the fall-back position of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Throughout the exercise of Security Council reform, my delegation has been guided by three main motivations: first, that of protecting my country's interests. Let us set the record straight. Everyone in this Hall promotes and is called on to promote his or her own national interests. I said last year, and I repeat now, that Italy, the fifth-largest producer of wealth in the world and soon to become the fifth-largest contributor to the United Nations regular budget, will never, never accept relegation to third- or fourth-class status.

Our second motivation is that of protecting a dream. Like many other Europeans, we Italians hope that in the not-too-distant future there can be a common European seat on the Security Council. Increasing the number of permanent members on the Council from the countries of the European Union would deal a setback to that dream rather than move it closer to reality.

Last but not least, we are motivated by the desire to protect the interests of the United Nations as a whole. Article 25 of the Charter provides that

> "The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council".

Such an enormous and extraordinary delegation of power can be upheld only through trust and a system of accountability. The one true test of accountability in a democratic system is regular elections. The creation of new permanent members would exempt certain countries from the test of regular elections and therefore further erode the supremacy of the General Assembly. We must not allow this to happen. For, in the end, the General Assembly is and must remain the cornerstone of our Organization.

To conclude, as Foreign Minister Dini wrote yesterday in an article published simultaneously in *The International Herald Tribune*, the *General Anzeiger*, and *Corriere della Sera*:

> "Any reform, if it is to pass the scrutiny of national parliaments and public opinion, must produce real progress in terms of the credibility, democracy and authority of the most universal of world institutions." [International Herald Tribune, Editorial/Opinion pages, 3 December 1997]

In other words, it must reflect a Security Council of the future, not the Security Council of the past.

Mr. Park (Republic of Korea): The reform of the Security Council is an issue of vital importance which has far-reaching implications not only for the future of the Organization itself but for the health of international relations in the twenty-first century as well. Although four years of deliberations in the Open-ended Working Group have not yet led to general agreement on any specific formula for reform, they have identified the key issues of contention and enabled us to discern what lies at the heart of the divergence of views among Member States.

We all agree that the changes in international relations over the past several decades are of a nature that warrants expansion of Council membership.

Divergent views exist on the issue of how these changes can best be reflected in alterations of the composition of the Council and how a mechanism can be devised to ensure that the composition remains in line with future changes in international relations. We believe that this divergence of views can be resolved if the reform of the Council is based on an objective analysis of the problems and shortcomings of the Council's operations thus far.

The last half century has witnessed the emergence of a considerable number of nations endowed with significant power resources with which to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. We believe that the Security Council should be reformed in a way which ensures that these nations can serve in the Council with reasonable frequency, commensurate with their capabilities to contribute to international peace and security. In our view, this can best be done through an increase in the non-permanent category of Council membership alone, by providing for a mechanism under which those countries with distinguished capabilities to contribute to international security can be elected to Council membership with greater frequency or longer tenure than others.

The idea of creating five new permanent seats, two from the industrialized world and three from the developing world, has been afloat for some time now. Over the past five decades some Member States have come to acquire power resources which are comparable to those held by some of the current permanent members. We fully understand the aspirations of some of these countries to permanent membership. However, we are concerned that an increase in permanent membership might actually create more problems than it solves.

Let me for the sake of clarity elaborate further on some of the problems we should expect to arise.

First of all, there seems to be no clear way to determine which countries are qualified for permanent membership and which are not. If any proposed expansion of permanent seats takes place, there are certain to be many other Member States that are not fortunate enough to be elected to new permanent membership but that are just as qualified in terms of power resources as those that do. This means that, in the name of eliminating the existing discrimination between current permanent members and aspirants to new permanent membership, we would actually end up creating an even worse system of discrimination that affects a greater number of countries. Those countries would feel marginalized and alienated as third-class Member States, and might well lose their incentive to make constructive contributions to the work of our Organization. Given the capability and willingness of these nations to make a meaningful contribution to international peace and security, this would be a setback to the health and vitality of the United Nations.

In the light of what takes place in the Security Council in terms of realpolitik, we are concerned that an increase in permanent membership could further enhance the possibility of excluding the real issues affecting international peace and security from the purview of the Security Council. It would also undermine the efficiency of the Council in responding to conflict situations in a timely manner, because more time would be spent on working out differences among a large number of permanent members.

The virtual irreplaceability of permanent members, once they are elected, is yet another serious problem associated with the increase in permanent membership. If a one-time decision were to hold sway for all time, Member States would be forced to live for ever with the results of one fateful decision based on the international political realities at a fixed point in time, regardless of the dynamic evolution of international relations that might unfold in the future. The dynamics of international relations are such that in the future there could be other countries which catch up with or surpass the power resources of permanent members. A system of periodic review cannot properly address the problem of the growing gap between the composition of the Council and underlying international realities because new permanent members would be able to perpetuate their privileged status with the support of a mere one third of the general membership.

Apart from these problems, an increase in the ratio of Council members not regularly elected by — and thus not accountable to — the general membership would undermine the political legitimacy and credibility of the Council to act on behalf of the general membership. This is certainly not consistent with the vision which my Government holds for the Security Council in the twenty-first century.

Bearing these problems in mind, we strongly hope that common ground can be found which will enable us to transform the Security Council into a more representative, effective, efficient and democratic body. We will work closely with other interested Member States to work out a solution acceptable to the entire

membership. We will remain open-minded and flexible with regard to any constructive proposals which can move this important process in the right direction.

My delegation would like to say a word on the current under-representation of the Asian Group in the Security Council. As it stands, without counting permanent members, the Asian Group of 48 countries holds the same number of non-permanent seats as the 33-member Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the 24-country Group of Western European and other States. The Asian Group is the only regional group which has expanded in both membership and geographical coverage since the end of the cold war. Given the number of countries and other relevant factors, the Asian Group deserves at least as many non-permanent seats as the African Group in an expanded Council. Any formula that fails to address this problem will be neither fair nor just for the Asian Group.

Finally, as a sponsor of draft resolution A/52/L.7, we reaffirm our opposition to any imposed artificial time-frame for deliberations on this important issue and to any attempt to adopt in the General Assembly substantive decisions by less than a two-thirds majority of the entire membership.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon at 3 p.m.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

United Nations A/52/PV.62*

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

62nd plenary meeting
Thursday, 4 December 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 59

Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters

Draft resolution (A/52/L.7)

Amendment (A/52/L.47)

The President: I would like to draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that two proposals have so far been submitted under the agenda item 59 of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, entitled "Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters". They are draft resolution A/52/L.7 and the amendments to it contained in document A/52/L.47.

As we are opening the debate on agenda item 59, I would like to reconfirm my understanding that the General Assembly will not be taking any decision on this item at this stage of its consideration, in accordance with the assurances that I have received to this effect.

Referring to my consultations with the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, I would also like to advise the Assembly that there is no requirement for proposals submitted under a particular agenda item to be introduced at the beginning of the consideration of that item by the Assembly. In accordance with the established practices of the General Assembly, proposals submitted under a particular agenda item are introduced by their sponsors prior to the General Assembly's proceeding to take a decision on them.

In view of these considerations, it is my understanding that the statements made by Member States in the course of the debate on agenda item 59, without prejudice to their substance, should not be considered formal introductions of the proposals.

It is also my understanding that the introductions of the proposals under this agenda item, if and when they take place, will be in the order they were submitted, in accordance with, *inter alia*, rules 78, 90 and 91 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

We shall now proceed with the debate on this agenda item.

Mr. Kausikan (Singapore): Our discussions on Security Council reform over the last four years have resulted in two clear, if somewhat contradictory, conclusions. First, there is little doubt that the majority of Member States consider the current composition and working methods of the Security Council archaic and unsatisfactory. Secondly, it is, unfortunately, equally clear that, notwithstanding this widely held view, there are few prospects for early progress. The key difficulties arise from the many contradictions and ambiguities in the positions that the current permanent members have taken

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* Reissued for technical reasons.

on Security Council reform; and, of course, the Charter gives them a decisive influence.

My delegation has on a number of previous occasions publicly analysed these contradictions and ambiguities. I will not repeat in detail what we have already exposed. I refer members to my delegation's statements in the Open-ended Working Group on Security Council reform of 5 and 9 May and most recently to my Minister's statement in this Hall on 29 September.

A central issue is the failure of the current permanent members to clearly pronounce themselves on whether a new permanent member, be it from an industrialized or a developing country, should have the veto. The power of a new permanent member is not a question that can be deferred to a later date merely to make it easier to select new permanent members. This is because the powers of the new permanent members are intrinsic to the very notion and definition of permanent membership.

We did not expect answers to the questions that we posed, and we have not received any satisfactory answer. We are not particularly disappointed. Resolving the ambiguities is not just a matter of negotiating a text in a working group. It is not just a question of clever drafting or diplomatic ingenuity to paper over differences. The ambiguities reflect profound geopolitical uncertainties that can be settled only over time by events in the real world, and not in any working group.

This ought to be obvious if we consider the origins of the current permanent membership. The countries that are permanent members were the victors of the Second World War. They gave themselves the privilege of the veto because they were then so essential to the maintenance of international peace and security that they had to be reassured that they could not be compelled to take any action that could lead to conflicts among themselves. This would have broken up the United Nations.

At the end of the Second World War, it was relatively easy to determine the identity of these powerful few. With most of the world in ruins after a long and devastating conflict, it was easy to discern the winners and losers. It was logical that the victors should bear the primary responsibility for maintaining the new international order. In any case, there was no choice. No one else was in a position to successfully argue against their claims. Their status as permanent members reflected the compelling geopolitical realities of the day.

Nevertheless, even then two of the three big victors — the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom — were sceptical of Roosevelt's view of China's ability to play a major role in the post-war world, and Churchill's insistence on including France among the elite group met with similar scepticism from Roosevelt and Stalin. It should not therefore surprise us that we now run into even greater difficulties in trying to decide who belongs in the new elite.

The end of the cold war took everybody by surprise. Its resolution was far from clear-cut. The end of the cold war has precipitated a period of transition and uncertainty. We are still debating the consequences because we are still living through them. It is of course obvious that the world has changed, but this does not in itself prescribe any particular new geopolitical configuration. The power structure of the post-cold-war international order is still evolving. The outcome of this process cannot as yet be predicted. The United Nations, as an Organization of sovereign States, must necessarily reflect international reality more than shape it, whatever else some may pretend to believe. But even this incontrovertible fact provides no practical guidance for our discussions on Security Council reform.

If the purpose of Security Council reform is to more accurately reflect the post-cold-war world, then, logically, there should now be only one permanent member. Only the United States now disposes of the political, military and economic clout on the global scale needed to maintain international peace and security. But, of course, it is politically unacceptable to have only one permanent member. And even the United States, in its post-cold-war mood of introspection, faces domestic political difficulties in exercising its undoubted capabilities. The Administration's failure to persuade Congress to pay its arrears to the United Nations is but one small symptom.

Even a cursory examination of the current situation of the other permanent members may lead us to wonder what real meaning permanent membership has in the contemporary situation of geopolitical flux and uncertainty. Russia's main preoccupations are internal, and understandably so. Given the serious problems that it is grappling with, Russia has neither the capability nor the desire to consistently exercise power on a global scale as the Soviet Union did. Russia will certainly rise again, but it will be a different Russia with global interests and relationships different from those of the Soviet Union.

China is already a rising Power, but it is still primarily a regional Power. In per capita terms it will be a poor country well into the next century. Its focus is on economic development and resolving urgent internal problems. Its primary international interest for many years to come will be to secure peace and stability around its immediate borders so that it can continue to grow and deal with its internal problems. It will not be as deeply engaged elsewhere.

The United Kingdom and France are now European Powers with at best only residual global influence and limited clout outside the European Union. The sad recent history of Bosnia demonstrated that even the most powerful European States were not capable of settling a European problem by themselves. It was the intervention of the United States that proved decisive, and the United States chose the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), not the United Nations Security Council, as the vehicle for its intervention.

It is clear that most of the current permanent members no longer have the will or the capability to exercise power on the global scale necessary to maintain international peace and security as envisaged by the Charter. It is a geopolitical reality that in present times several current permanent members are not permanent members because they are great Powers or global Powers in the traditional sense of these terms. By a reversal of logic, if they currently enjoy the status of a great or a global Power, it is primarily because they are already permanent members.

Before I am drowned out by howls of protest, let me hastily make my position clear. I am not suggesting that Security Council reform requires that any current permanent member be relegated to the common herd. Of course, the consequences of such a suggestion are too horrifying to contemplate, especially for the countries that will be directly affected. So let it be placed on the record that I accept and respect the historical fait accompli, even if its logic is no longer compelling. I recognize the useful and constructive roles that many current permanent members continue to play in international affairs. And even if these are not the roles for which they were originally given permanent status, they deserve our appreciation.

My point is simply that these are different roles. These are no longer unique roles that no other country is capable of assuming. Several other Members of the United Nations already play similar roles without any ambition of elevation to permanent status.

Perhaps our discussion on Security Council reform would progress a little better if we temporarily abandon futile arguments over number and identity for a more fundamental re-examination of the meaning of permanent membership in the last years of the twentieth century. Let us examine what is really needed to maintain international peace and security in the twenty-first century. This is why my delegation had suggested, as early as the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly four years ago, that our discussions on Security Council reform should begin with an examination of the criteria for permanent membership. We are encouraged that several other delegations appear to be coming around to this view.

Our essential point can be stated simply. A reformed Security Council must reflect the post-cold-war geopolitical configuration if it is to be effective. The crucial decisions that will affect this geopolitical configuration are not going to be made in New York, or even in London, Paris, Washington, Beijing, Moscow, Berlin or Tokyo. It is not even clear that the geopolitical configuration can be shaped by a conscious and planned process of decision-making. The post-cold-war geopolitical configuration is going to emerge only gradually, over time, through the interactions of different countries in different regions of the world. It will be shaped by developments that cannot yet be predicted, developments which will probably surprise even those countries whose policies precipitated them. We will only waste time if we continue to pretend, as we unfortunately too often have for the last four years, that we can gather in a room in New York to decide the twenty-first century's geopolitical power structure through abstract intellectual debates.

Let me conclude by illustrating the point more concretely. My delegation has on several occasions commented on the studied ambiguity with which several, if not the majority, of the current permanent members have cloaked crucial aspects of their position on Security Council reform. This is understandable. No country is ever comfortable with a change in a status quo that favours it. But, that said, I must also acknowledge that a majority of the permanent members have appeared most categoric in their desire to see Japan and Germany as new permanent members. Let me therefore take that as the starting point of my illustration.

Many countries, certainly including my own and perhaps even a majority of Member States, would agree that when general agreement is reached on the expansion of the Security Council, Japan and Germany should be

among the new permanent members. That Japan and Germany now exercise global economic clout is not in dispute. Nor is the fact that they want and are searching for a bigger international political role. These are positive developments. They are among the new realities whose consequences have yet to unfold.

But precisely because of this, there is still no clear consensus, either in Germany or Japan or in their respective regions, on the precise international roles they should play, particularly if this will involve the deployment of military forces. There has never been a period in the entire sweep of Asian history in which China and Japan have been simultaneously strong Powers. We are now entering such a period, with all its attendant uncertainties. In Europe, a newly unified Germany and a Russia that is still struggling to redefine itself apart from the former Soviet Union are both, for different reasons, currently internally preoccupied. Neither has yet definitively settled their relationship with each other or with their neighbours.

It is therefore not surprising that China and Russia, like all other permanent members, have not been clear on whether or not Japan and Germany should have the veto. It is therefore still unclear whether they really believe Germany and Japan should be new permanent members — and this even though Japan and Germany enjoy widespread support for permanent membership from many other Member States.

I am not suggesting that Moscow and Beijing are being particularly difficult or different. After all, even the United States has not yet clearly stated that it trusts its own treaty allies, whose elevation to permanent status it strongly and publicly advocates, sufficiently to give them a veto over American policies. And even if the Administration is willing to do so, I am not sure Congress would agree.

This hesitation and coyness is perhaps only prudent. Perhaps it is even a duty, given the geopolitical uncertainties of the contemporary international system. Nobody wants to give any hostages to fortune. For the same reason, no Government that really believes that its country deserves permanent status can permanently commit all future governments to giving up the veto. The geopolitical uncertainties are no less elsewhere in Asia, Africa and Latin America. They will certainly not be settled by conceptually contradictory slogans such as permanent rotational membership, as has been suggested by some.

I hope I am not misunderstood. I am not suggesting that China and Japan cannot cooperate or that Germany and Russia will never coexist. This is obviously not true, because they are already doing so. But the present happy situation is not to be taken for granted given the long, complex and often troubled history of relations between these countries — a history that, in the case of China and Japan, has been characterized by many centuries of profound ambiguity. It is not unreasonable for countries that enjoy the privileges of the status quo to prefer to avoid making precipitate decisions. In fact, this is an entirely reasonable position to take given the geopolitical uncertainties. It would therefore be equally unreasonable to expect Asia, Africa or Latin America to take precipitate decisions on who from their regions should enjoy permanent status.

Time and events will clarify matters. How much time, no one can presently honestly say. Events must mature and unfold naturally to clarify themselves. This is not a process that can or should be rushed.

We would do the United Nations and the Security Council grievous damage if we were to take decisions that might eventually bear only a tenuous relationship to what finally evolves in the real world. Any international organization of sovereign States dooms itself to irrelevance if it ignores or divorces itself from the realities in which it is embedded. And the shape of those realities can be only imperfectly glimpsed at present. This is why we, like other Non-Aligned Movement countries, have been consistent in cautioning against a hasty decision on Security Council reform. A Security Council that includes all who now most assiduously press their claims to permanent status, but excludes other, currently not so obvious candidates whose claims may yet become compelling, would not just be ineffective. It would tear this Organization apart.

Four years is not a long time, given the gravity of the issues at stake. We understand the frustrations of those who see their hopes and ambitions recede with each passing year of endless debate. But pressure-cooking the process will not settle the crucial geopolitical realities that will, in the end, be decisive. Those countries that deserve permanent status will be given it when the time is ripe, not before. And when the time is ripe, there is no power that can resist their claims. Let us therefore not lose faith or patience and by so doing come to regret the consequences.

Mr. Gomersall (United Kingdom): I do not wish to be misunderstood either. I do not want it to be thought that I am taking the floor in right of reply to the previous speaker. His views are always stimulating, though slightly exaggerated. But, as always, finding fault with the existing realities is somewhat of an evasion of the necessity which I think we all feel to try and find a way forward to the problems which he delineates, and the only way forward is to find a solution through negotiation. We have made a lot of painstaking efforts in that direction, and my delegation believes that the sensible thing to do is to continue.

It is always easy to attack the existing system without being quite so frank about the choices which all countries have to make with regard to the areas closest to themselves. We believe that the proposals which are on the table, in particular those submitted by President Razali last year, offer the best way of dealing with that admittedly very sensitive subject.

It was four years and one day ago that the General Assembly adopted resolution 48/26, which established the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council, four years in which everybody has been agreed on the objective of enlargement of the Security Council, but in which, to the disappointment and frustration of the vast majority of us, a clearly ratifiable proposal for enlargement has yet to emerge. But the issue of the enlargement of the Security Council and reform of the methods of work of the Security Council remains as important now as it seemed to be four years ago. The political case for this item of reform is just as compelling as it is for other aspects of the modernization of this Organization.

We are closer now to seeing the outlines of a solution than we were at this time last year. This progress can be ascribed to two major developments: first, the consultations carried out by the co-vice-chairmen of the Working Group last winter. Their soundings demonstrated beyond any doubt that the vast majority of Member States do not want a temporary, half-hearted reform in just one category of Council membership, but a durable and significant enlargement in both categories of membership that increases developing country representation in those two categories. This general objective has furthermore been endorsed by several of the permanent members. For this, and for the rest of their hard work, we owe the co-Vice-Chairmen, Ambassadors Breitenstein and Jayanama, a vote of great thanks.

The second development was the presentation last March, by the then President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Razali, of a draft resolution on reform. This moved the discussion in a more concrete direction, and was the sort of comprehensive proposal which had long been required. It built on the co-vice-chairmen's consultations. It identified the mainstream in the debate, and came to be regarded as successfully representing the negotiating middle ground. Although it presented a number of delegations, including my own, with problems, it offered by far the best prospect for a solution so far, and indeed sparked a considerable amount of further positive consideration about how some of the remaining issues might eventually be solved. This was perhaps the most fruitful time in our debate so far, and we look forward to further consideration of the proposal this year.

Of course, neither of these developments brought about a consensus. Like your predecessor, Mr. President, you will be wise enough to recognize that consensus on a solution to this particular issue is probably unobtainable. But we recognize the need to respect the requirements of Article 108 of the Charter in a resolution adopting amendments to the Charter. Indeed, the statutory two-thirds majority for such a resolution would be a barely acceptable minimum. We want further efforts on a concrete proposal to reconcile the views of the greatest possible number of Member States. But at the end of the day, the General Assembly is here to take political decisions, and every effort should be made to take the necessary decisions at this session of the General Assembly — and by the largest possible majority.

There is always an argument for putting something off. When Mr. Razali produced his proposal, the response was not so much that he had misjudged the content, but that more time should be given for consultation, particularly at the level of regional groups, and that the Assembly should not be rushed into a decision which would have lasting implications. That was nearly nine months ago. The proposal did serve, however, as an impetus for more focused thinking on how the tricky questions — in particular that of selecting new permanent members, especially from the developing world — should be approached, and in this regard it was a positive step forward.

Draft resolution A/52/L.7, sponsored by Italy and others, is, on the other hand, simply an invitation to eternal delay. Whatever the diversity of views among its supporters, it offers a backhanded endorsement of the

status quo and ignores the progress which we made last year. We would share many of the specific comments made on the draft resolution by Ambassador Eitel in his latest letter to Permanent Representatives. We therefore welcome the announcement by you, Mr. President, of the understanding that no action will be taken on draft resolution A/52/L.7 at this stage.

The challenge remains, however, for the majority to find a basis for a broadly supported decision. My delegation is only one of many which have shown flexibility and political will over the last few months to try to achieve this, and we are not about to abandon the effort. There is now a much greater understanding on all sides of the parameters within which a workable outcome can be reached, and we will continue to make every effort with like-minded countries to bring this necessary reform to early fruition. Indeed, we are encouraged by the fact that the political energy still invested in this discussion proves that, underneath it all, there is a widespread recognition that this reform is inevitable.

We hope therefore that we shall begin our work in the new year with determination, building on the progress made during the fifty-first session and with an eye to taking a decision on the size and shape of the Council before the end of this "Reform Assembly".

Mr. Eitel (Germany): For several weeks, many of us have been working to prepare for the discussion on agenda item 59. I am pleased that today offers another opportunity to make a couple of remarks on the issue. It is first and foremost here in the General Assembly that the important issues are and must be decided.

You, Mr. President, have prepared this debate carefully. You have consulted many delegations and have formed a common understanding about the way for our discussions to go forward and about their procedural result. You have acted with the authority and credibility inherent in the office of the President, and you deserve credit and applause. My delegation will do everything to respect and support your guidance.

The year 1997, especially the past few weeks, has been particularly dynamic as far as Security Council reform is concerned. It seems to me that procedural considerations, such as when and how the General Assembly should take a decision, have become more and more important and have been discussed almost more frequently than substance.

What precisely has happened since the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council started its work last January? First, we have witnessed the largest consultations in the history of the United Nations: the consultations of the co-Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group, Ambassador Breitenstein and Ambassador Jayanama, with 165 Member States, which led to major findings and clear majority views. Secondly, we have witnessed the presentation of the first full reform package, submitted by the former Chairman, Ambassador Razali. Thirdly, we have participated in the opening debate of the new session with Member States overwhelmingly focusing on United Nations and Security Council reform.

On these lines, I would like in my statement to focus on the following four main points: Germany as part of the mainstream; putting an end to self-centred discussions; the need for an agenda rather than an imposed time-frame; and faithful application of Article 108 of the Charter.

Six general debates, six agenda item debates and four Open-ended Working Group reports, with 48 annexes all together, have provided us with an extraordinary amount of statements, positions and proposals. Sometimes I feel as if we were like 185 pedestrians, looking for their way home in a big, rather dark, city with many unfamiliar streets, avenues and places. Many of us were lucky to find their way — they took what I will call the "Avenue of the Two Enlarged Categories". That Avenue is ample and straight, with enough space for everyone. I would like to see as many as possible of the pedestrians who are still in search of their way, join those who have started to walk down the "Avenue of the Two Enlarged Categories". This Avenue is spacious; it has two lanes. It is straight; there are no unnecessary detours. It is secure in spite of heavy traffic — hopefully, 24 members of an enlarged Council. It has enough sidewalk space. It is easy to look down because it is transparent. And it is easy to maintain — the next overhaul, by a review, is already scheduled.

In my view, both the former Chairman and the co-Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group have made it clear in their papers annexed to the last report that their assessment of the views of 165 Member States go in that direction. One of the main findings was that a very large majority supported an increase in both categories — permanent and non-permanent — with a

majority of them supporting an increase of five non-permanent and five permanent members, while only a few expressed categorical opposition to an increase in permanent membership. The Vice-Chairmen concluded that their findings made it clear that the Open-ended Working Group should fulfil its mandate within an expeditious and realistic time-frame.

I carefully double-checked both elements — enlargement in the two categories and expeditious fulfilment of the mandate — with the views expressed by Heads of State, Heads of Government, Foreign Ministers and Heads of Delegation during this session's opening debate in September-October. Regarding the first element, I found that only 11 — which makes 12 per cent — out of 93 Member States that addressed the question of categories were against new permanent members, four of them expressing not even categorical opposition, but, rather, doubts or preference for rotation schemes on permanent seats. The rest, 81 Member States — which makes 88 per cent — favoured an increase in both categories. Among those that did not address the question were many Member States which referred in general to the official Organization of African Unity (OAU) position or which are otherwise known to support enlargement in both categories of membership.

Regarding the second element, my main criterion was: how did delegations tackle the question of the right timing? Out of 176 statements, 85 — which is almost 80 per cent of those that addressed this question — made more or less the point that a decision on Security Council reform should be taken soon. Only 18 — which is about 20 per cent of those who spoke to it — argued openly against any decision in the near future.

We must face one certainty: as long as we continue our discussion without a concrete negotiating text, all of us will continue to bargain for "best positions". If these "best positions" are maintained or new "best positions" are added, the failure of Security Council reform is guaranteed.

From the beginning, my delegation has tried to do its part to facilitate the process. We have proposed a periodic review which allows new permanent members to be replaced after 10, 15 or 20 years, thereby introducing a new and accountable concept of permanency. Moreover, we have stated on various occasions that, while discrimination within membership categories must be avoided, innovative and future-oriented ways of exercising the veto could be introduced.

In other areas, we also plead for a compromise between minimalist and maximalist positions, leading us to an enlargement package with the following features. The first is four new non-permanent members. The second is five new permanent members, three from the South and two industrialized States. Thirdly, there is election of the possible new permanent members by the General Assembly. Regional groups are not denied the right to propose regional mechanisms to the General Assembly as well; the General Assembly has the final decision. Fourthly, the original permanent members are to be engaged in a dialogue on their veto. Fifthly, the General Assembly decides about a veto for the new permanent members. If it does not agree on a solution, a high-level working group might be set up. In the meantime, new permanent members would enjoy certain interim rights.

Member States have come a long way in discussing reform. Since before 1992, when Member States were invited to submit comments on a possible review of the membership of the Security Council, the issue has been discussed year after year during the opening and the general debate of the forty-seventh, forty-eighth, forty-ninth, fiftieth and fifty-first sessions and now the fifty-second session. In addition, in 1993 the Open-ended Working Group was established, and since then it has submitted its yearly reports to the General Assembly. These reports were considered and adopted by the General Assembly in 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997.

This issue cannot continue to be discussed in an abstract and endless manner. It ties up too many resources. Spending too much time and too many resources on dealing only with our own, home-made institutional challenges is not in line with our moral obligation to tackle the really pressing issues, issues which this Organization was created for. As examples, let me mention the areas of development, environment and human rights. In any of them, the existing situation gives serious reason for concern and requires immediate action. Can Member States and the United Nations afford to remain caught up in an internal, self-centred institutional debate which started at the beginning of this decade, if not earlier? My answer is a straight "No". Let us therefore put an end to our navel-gazing and show public opinion that the United Nations can do more than get absorbed in self-focused discussions. Security Council reform is not *l'art pour l'art*.

The imposed time-frame notion has made its entry into declarations of important groups of Member States,

such as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of African States, to mention only two. Germany could not agree more with this position. No one can impose a time-frame on the General Assembly. There can be little doubt either that the General Assembly is sovereign in arranging a calendar for its decisions, if it wants to. A decision taken by the General Assembly in this sense, and in accordance with the Charter and the rules of procedure, is not "imposed"; at least, I myself have never heard someone question the legitimacy of a decision of the General Assembly by calling it "imposed". What we are dealing with here is not an imposed time-frame but a most ordinary agenda. It is agendas which determine our lives. Without an agenda little would ever go ahead.

By taking a decision in the near future, we would not introduce divisions in the United Nations membership, as some have claimed. The opposite seems to me to be true: the real division would be a continuation of fruitless and antagonizing exchanges in the Open-ended Working Group without any time agenda. Rather, further damage and contention would be prevented if an early preliminary decision to put Security Council reform on the tracks were taken through a democratic decision-making process in the General Assembly.

While I am convinced that sufficient time for reflection has to be given to those who need it, I am also pleading that we give ourselves a clear agenda to arrive at a decision. Moreover, I would like to point out two things. First, my delegation, at least, was not ready, and still is not ready, to put forward a proposal, since we feel that, in particular, the question of the overall size of the Security Council has not yet been agreed entirely. Secondly, if we had found agreement on a proposal with our like-minded friends, the Assembly can take my word that it would not have been presented to the membership by surprise. We have always been open about that, to everybody, including the main sponsors of document A/52/L.7.

Let me finally turn to a point of particular importance: the proposal to go beyond the Charter and to apply its Article 108 not only to amendments, but also to "amendment implications". I have been wondering what "implications" could mean in legal terms. For instance has a resolution like the one the Sixth Committee — our lawyers — adopted on 6 December 1995, with the positive votes of Italy and Mexico and as many as 92 countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, among them Egypt and Pakistan, had Charter amendment "implications"? When I read the resolution I found that by it the General Assembly recognizes that

> "the 'enemy State' clauses in Articles 53, 77 and 107 of the Charter have become obsolete". [Resolution 50/52, thirteenth preambular paragraph]

A few lines later the resolution expresses the intention of the General Assembly to

> "initiate the procedure set out in Article 108 of the Charter ... to amend the Charter" [ibid, para. 3]

— that is, to apply Article 108 only at a later, perhaps the next, stage of the process. In my view, resolution 50/52 did have clear Charter amendment "implications", but correctly deferred the application of Article 108 to the next stage of amending the Charter *in concreto*.

To take another example: what if a draft Charter amendment resolution were to be postponed or submitted to a no-action motion? Would not we have to admit that these actions had "implications" for the envisaged Charter amendments? Or does not the General Assembly, when it decides to adopt reports of the Open-ended Working Group stating that there is agreement to expand the Security Council — see, for instance, paragraph 13 of document A/49/47 of 15 September 1995 — take decisions with Charter amendment "implications"?

Security Council reform is too important an issue to let ambiguities on the necessary voting majorities continue to exist. In paragraph 2 of Article 18, the Charter provides that decisions on important questions

> "shall be made by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting".

I shall give an example. If for a vote on an important resolution which does not contain a Charter amendment 180 Member States are present and 170 of them vote, the necessary majority will be 114, which is two-thirds of 170. It is Germany's firm view that this majority must apply to important resolutions dealing with Security Council reform.

Article 108 of the Charter requires a majority of two-thirds of all Member States, which means at least 124 out of the present 185 Member States. Scholars and academia consider Article 108 a derogation of, and exception to, the general rules laid down in paragraph 2 of Article 18 of the Charter, and therefore not open to analogous extension and applicable only when — to quote Article 108 — "Amendments to the present Charter" are submitted. The *raison d'etre* of Article 108 is that the

authors of the Charter wanted to make sure that any amendment to be sent to parliaments for ratification would have received beforehand a sufficiently large majority in the General Assembly to guarantee its following ratification.

Introducing a term like "Charter amendment implications" is not helpful, and even risks disrespect for the Charter and its well-defined voting system. Politically, it does not make a great difference, since the necessity of reaching a two-thirds majority of members present and voting under paragraph 2 of Article 18 is undisputed. When the General Assembly decision on concrete Charter amendments is taken, the necessary majority will, of course, have to be at least 124.

This interpretation of Article 108 of the Charter seems to me to be clear. However, in order to have the question clarified for everybody, I should like to ask you, Mr. President, to request a legal opinion from the Secretariat on the issue of whether or not Article 108 of the Charter is also applicable to decisions with amendment "implications".

Mr. Amorim (Brazil): Mr. President, I would like to start by expressing my delegation's sincere appreciation for your skilful guidance in preparing the ground for today's debate. Security Council reform being one of the central issues on the United Nations agenda, it is reassuring to note that the President of the General Assembly is ready to exercise his wisdom and leadership in order to move our debate forward.

We have travelled a considerable distance since I last took the podium to address this issue a year ago. Thanks to the competence and dedication demonstrated by the co-Vice-Chairmen of the Working Group, Ambassador Breitenstein of Finland and Ambassador Jayanama of Thailand, we were able to start the year 1997 under the sign of a renewed dynamism. The exchange of views which they carried out with a total of 165 delegations, large and small, individually or in groups, revealed certain trends, providing delegations with a more focused image of where the possibilities for agreement lie. Their important findings, as transmitted to the Working Group on 10 and 14 March, have been included in our latest report, document A/51/47, under annex VII, and deserve to be recalled.

The co-Vice-Chairmen were able to discern the existence of a very large majority which favours an increase in both permanent and non-permanent membership. It is also of great significance that this majority believes there should be permanent members from both developing and industrialized countries.

These are the essential elements on the basis of which we must search for general agreement. My delegation, along with many others, is ready to proceed on Council reform taking fully into account the solid preparatory groundwork undertaken during this active year. As was made clear in the speech delivered by the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Relations, Ambassador Luiz Felipe Lampreia:

> "There is a new thrust to negotiations. There is leadership, as well as carefully crafted proposals. We must take advantage of this unique opportunity in the history of the United Nations. We must not let the moment pass. Reform has become, more than a key concept; it has become the order of the day". [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 5th meeting, p. 7]

In January 1998 the Working Group will resume its activities. Brazil is convinced that there is no need for additional exploratory debates and that we should fully embark on a negotiating process. We do not favour the establishment of artificial targets of any kind for completing our work. But we also oppose attempts to unduly slow down proceedings. Let us put aside the idea of artificial time-frames of any kind, either to impose hasty solutions or to obstruct the process. Let us make the most of the present session of the General Assembly in its entirety and concentrate our attention on the issues that require further refinement, such as veto and numbers — and I will come back to that later.

In this year's general debate, Brazil expressed its willingness to accept the responsibilities of permanent membership in the Security Council, if called upon by the international community. Brazil is determined to carry out the role of permanent member as the representative of Latin America and the Caribbean so that our region may be present in the Council on a permanent basis and, through regular coordination and consultation, have a strong collective voice. As a non-permanent member, we have endeavoured in the past to maintain close coordination with countries in the region, and we will continue to do so during our next mandate. We are prepared to make this coordination and these consultations even more systematic and formal, in order

to ensure that the interests and concerns of the region will be reflected to the fullest extent possible.

We consider that the proposal contained in annex I of this year's report — the so-called Razali proposal — constitutes an appropriate framework, with the necessary adjustments, for reforming the Security Council in a non-discriminatory and democratic way, allowing for Member States to express themselves in the General Assembly on candidacies for permanent membership from both the industrialized and the developing world. The proposal provides sufficient leeway for regional consultation and does not prejudge any outcome, although it does rule out discriminatory ones, which is one of the main reasons why we value it so much. We should not forget, in this respect, that since the adoption at the end of the General Assembly's fiftieth session of the report contained in document A/50/47, we have been working under the assumption that:

> "In the event that there is agreement for an increase in the permanent membership, an increase only by industrialized countries would be widely regarded as unacceptable." [A/50/47, para. 26]

We would regard a reform which ascribed full permanent seats to industrialized countries and rotating seats to the developing world as unacceptable and contrary to that conclusion. It is a different matter if one part of the world comes forth with a specific suggestion arrived at by consensus, at the regional level, and submits it to the General Assembly. We understand that this has been a position held by African countries, and we fully respect that, even if, conceptually, we might have our misgivings.

We are confident that we will continue to move away from discriminatory conceptions of expansion and that those who contemplate the idea of permanent rotating seats as a solution for their own region will continue to hold that this is not exportable. As far as we are concerned, there is no market in Latin America and the Caribbean for this product.

In spite of the important strides made this year, we have still not found a centre of gravity as regards some complex issues, such as the veto and the total number of members in an expanded Council. Brazil has advanced several ideas with the objective of rendering the decision-making process in the Security Council more democratic, without impinging upon Charter privileges which the five permanent members are clearly unprepared to give up at this stage. We believe that there should be no discrimination, in principle, between current and new permanent members. At the same time, we have suggested that new permanent members might consider the option of not exercising their veto rights, without relinquishing them, until a comprehensive agreement on decision-making, involving all permanent members, can be arrived at. In other words, sensitive as the veto issue may be, it should not prevent us from moving ahead on expanding the Council's composition.

As to the overall number of members, a few delegations continue to have misgivings about a Council of more than 21 participants, in contrast with the preference of the wide majority for a higher figure, somewhere in the mid-twenties. While the problems related to the veto — in spite of the fact that they touch on difficult questions of principle — may be surmountable through intensified dialogue and negotiation, it appears that the numbers issue is at once a simpler but a more immediate stumbling block. It is our expectation that, as other aspects fall into place, some creative thinking on matters such as the action threshold and on improved Security Council practices and procedures may be able to help us in this regard.

It has sometimes been alleged that the incapacity of developing countries to reach consensus on prospective permanent members constitutes a major obstacle at this stage of our work. This is a gross distortion of the facts. To start with, as we all know, the strongest opposition to expansion in permanent membership is to be found in the industrialized world itself. The argument according to which there is no consensus in the regions of the South applies, perhaps with greater validity, to regions of the North. But this is not the issue. Consensus, although desirable, may not be attainable in any region, North or South. The real issues that are impeding progress are the veto and the numbers question. These should be the focus of attention as we resume our discussions within the Working Group next year.

If so many delegations have expressed an interest on this item of our agenda it is because we are here discussing the credibility of the United Nations in a principal area of concern: the maintenance of international peace and security. The future of the multilateral system of collective security rests on the legitimacy and representativeness of the Security Council. As recently stated in the British magazine *The Economist* in an article on one of the major crises that the world is facing now,

"the Security Council is in a poor way, knowing that it should long ago have reformed itself".

Let us not prolong this agony indefinitely. Let us work firmly and responsibly towards a solution that is equitable and balanced, that takes into account aspirations of all nations, large and small, developed and developing, but, above all, let us bear in mind that this exercise is not about the prestige of any individual country or group of countries. It is about the prestige and effectiveness of our Organization.

Mr. Donokusumo (Indonesia): It is most gratifying for my delegation to note that the deliberations in the Open-ended Working Group during the past five years on the question of expansion and reform of the Security Council have, so far, resulted in progress in some areas of interest to Member States. Chief among them has been the recognition that an increase in its membership must reflect the vastly increased membership of the Organization and take into account the significant changes that have taken place in the international arena. It should also encompass the current geopolitical realities, lead to the Council's democratization and confer greater legitimacy on its decisions. Thus, the culmination of our efforts should lead to a revamped Security Council that can effectively meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Beyond this paradigm, however, and notwithstanding strenuous and dedicated efforts, it is undeniable that the discussions in the Working Group have been stymied over a myriad of issues, most notably the size and scope of its expansion and its modalities, the election of new permanent members and equitable representation for the developing countries, decision-making and accountability. These have so far defied a rational solution and cannot be brushed aside. The numerous proposals that have been submitted do not as yet constitute a workable hypothesis from which to proceed further and to seek an acceptable solution. This is because some of them were deemed inequitable and discriminatory and, hence, non-starters, while others call for further clarification and elucidation.

Clearly, therefore, a general agreement has so far eluded us, because of fundamental differences on the issues involved. Consequently, the mandate entrusted to the Working Group remains unfulfilled.

The fact that reform of the Security Council has been long overdue and has become urgent should not lead us to hasty and ill-considered solutions which will call into question the integrity and credibility of the reform process. In my delegation's view, that would constitute a flawed approach which is unlikely to contribute to the strengthening of the Security Council, to which we are all committed.

For these reasons, my delegation calls for a continuation of the Working Group's deliberations in addressing the unresolved issues and in narrowing our differences. We are committed to achieving further progress under its auspices and have full confidence in the effective discharge of its mandate. However, we are also acutely aware of continuing differences on many substantive issues, which have persisted. Hence, it is not tenable to adopt an expeditious approach in seeking agreements of a comprehensive nature while papering over these differences and disagreements.

This is precisely the reason why Indonesia has endorsed the call for taking the time that is necessary so that we can endeavour to reach a general agreement. It is fully in conformity with the position taken by the ministerial meeting of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries held in New York last September, which unequivocally expressed its opposition to an imposed time-frame. The communiqué issued by the meeting along with those by the Organization of African Unity and the Ibero-American meetings held last summer should constitute reference guides for our future endeavours.

It is self-evident that the complex set of issues attendant upon the question of expansion and reform of the Security Council is not amenable to a general agreement at this point of time, which has rendered imperative the renewal of dialogue for a thorough discussion of all the questions without an artificial acceleration of the whole process. That would afford an opportunity not only to undertake a review and reappraisal of the proposals already submitted, but also to consider new proposals such as two new permanent members for the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. And it would also deal with Article 108 of the Charter, which will surely be invoked in the event of amendments and whose centrality and sanctity must be preserved. Its faithful and consistent implementation must be ensured in the context of the restructuring of the Security Council.

In conclusion, Mr. President, my delegation is deeply indebted to you for your role in facilitating assurances from interested Member States that:

"we will not be taking any decisions on this item at this stage of its consideration."

You have thus paved the way for a fuller discussion of all the issues involved and for a democratic decision by the General Assembly. This augurs well for our future endeavours in seeking well thought out and balanced decisions.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*interpretation from French*): For the fourth consecutive year, the Assembly is meeting to consider the report of the Open-ended Working Group on the question of equitable representation of and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council. This indicates the great importance of what is at stake and the complexity of the question of reform of this powerful decision-making organ of the Organization.

Since the General Assembly decided to establish the Open-ended Working Group on reform of the Security Council in 1993, every delegation here has devoted a great deal of energy to thinking about the issue and a great deal of time to seeking points of agreement in an attempt to achieve the much desired reform of this central organ of the United Nations system in a spirit of harmony.

I am pleased to emphasize and welcome the commendable efforts of States individually and groups of States collectively to make their valuable contributions to this joint thought process.

The presentation last March by the outgoing President of the General Assembly, Ambassador Razali, in his capacity as the Chairman of the Working Group, of documents summarizing the proposals of Member States, and the relevant decisions adopted by the Ministerial Conference of the Movement of the Non-Aligned Countries in New Delhi and the Organization of African Unity Summit in Harare, as well as the American proposals on the reform of the Council, are, in the view of my delegation, major steps forward stages and provide a perfect illustration of our collective commitment to promoting conditions for a significant breakthrough in our work.

However, there is no denying that despite these concrete, commendable efforts, prospects for complete and comprehensive reform of the Security Council to make it a modern, democratic and transparent organ are still an objective, a goal that is yet to be reached. Indeed, many questions are pending, in particular those relating to the expansion of the two categories of membership of the Council, the composition of the Council, the use of the right of veto, improvement of the Council's working methods, and the question of periodic review.

With regard to expansion, there can be no doubt that there are still marked differences between those advocating an expansion in both categories and those proposing an expansion limited only to the category of non-permanent members.

In this debate, we Africans have proposed and insist upon an expansion of the Council in both categories of members, and the granting to Africa of at least two permanent and two non-permanent seats, which would be apportioned to African countries on the basis of decisions by the Africans themselves, through a system of rotation based on criteria which are specific to Africa.

In this regard, the African Group will soon present a document on the concept and modalities of that rotation and its application to the permanent seats. In my view, this document is a major contribution to the efforts of our Working Group and deserves to be studied by the countries of the Group which are interested in this concept.

Once again, my delegation feels that the formula for this rotation is an African recipe. It is a system drawn from African wisdom, and which as such cannot be exported.

Turning to the question of the composition of the future Council, my delegation has always expressed the hope of achieving a dynamic compromise on the two current positions — that of democratization in representation, which presupposes a Council expanded to 26 members, and that of effectiveness in the functioning of the Council, which would reduce that number to 21. The dynamic compromise we seek, if it is to be achieved, should not occur to the detriment of the interests of our continent of Africa.

I am certain that the Chairman of the African Group, or the representative of Zimbabwe, whose country currently holds the presidency of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), will speak during the discussion to set out the African position on Security Council reform in detail.

On the issue of the veto, we have noted the resistance in some quarters, especially among certain

permanent members, to accepting changes with respect both to the limitation and the elimination of the right of veto which has, in the eyes of the majority of States, become an anachronistic right.

On the basis of the principle that debates dealing with the expansion of the Council and the application of the right of veto could lead to a real blockage of all our discussions, last April I put forward, on behalf of my delegation, the idea of engaging in an in-depth debate on the question of the veto with the permanent members, in order to reach an agreement with them on modifications which, by common consent, could be made to the scope of application of the veto.

At that time, I advocated entrusting the study of the delicate and complex question of the veto to a restricted but open committee made up of certain designated ambassadors within the Working Group, whose mandate would be to focus exclusively on an overall in-depth study of the question of the right of veto, bearing in mind the views of the permanent members and the numerous ideas developed by Member States in the debates.

To my mind, this committee on the veto should work at the same time a the high-level Working Group sessions, so that the conclusions to be submitted to the broader Working Group will fit smoothly into a general agreement on the reform of the Security Council. I believe that this approach elicited some interest, and I am happy to note today that this idea has made some headway and could be taken up again in the framework of our future negotiations.

Once the scope of application of the veto has been defined and accepted, the privilege of using that power should, in my delegation's view, belong to all permanent members, both the current ones and the new ones.

During our debates, many delegations have also put forward useful suggestions for improvements in the Council's methods of work which, if applied, would ensure greater transparency and legitimacy in this central organ of the system. Commendable efforts have already been carried out along these lines. They deserve to be followed up on, and the measures recommended should be institutionalized.

Likewise, and with a view to allowing the Security Council to adapt and play its full role as described in the Charter, it seems to me essential to establish a system of periodic review that would take world developments into account. To my mind, and as I understand it, only the length of the review period remains the subject of some differences of opinion, which I consider to be surmountable if the political will exists.

The work of reforming the Security Council calls for an innovative and responsible approach on the part of the Member States, bearing in mind the very special interest given to this organ. The high-level Working Group on the reform of the Security Council has made considerable progress, even if consensus has yet to be achieved on such fundamental points as expansion, composition and the right of veto.

In my delegation's view, this is the time to appeal for a redoubling of our efforts and imagination and to make maximum use of the momentum created by our discussions, so as to achieve our objective of restructuring the Security Council as soon as possible.

My delegation therefore supports the recommendation made by the Working Group whereby the General Assembly would allow it to continue its work during this fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, my delegation feels that the present work on reforming the Security Council is a historic opportunity, in the wake of the reform of 1965. For us, the countries of Africa, this is the only opportunity we have to be better represented within this organ. My country therefore feels that we should not be obliged to lose this chance to become future permanent and non-permanent members of this organ, which is invested with genuine decision-making power within the system.

It must be acknowledged that there are still problems to be solved, compromises to be reached, and reconciliation to be achieved. Let us be brave enough to say so. But let us also agree, in good faith, to move forward by capitalizing on the points of convergence and preserving what has been achieved and the momentum created, so as to bring to a harmonious and reasonably speedy conclusion our joint inquiry into the important issue which has been entrusted to us.

Mr. Tello (Mexico) (*interpretation from Spanish*): Today, the General Assembly is considering the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council. This topic has undoubtedly occupied an important place in reflections on United Nations reform, and has attracted the attention of public opinion.

Only a few months ago, when it concluded its deliberations on the subject for 1997, the General Assembly had the opportunity of examining the report submitted to it by the Open-ended Working Group dealing with the matter. The Assembly adopted without a vote the draft decision contained in paragraph 10 of document A/51/47, recommending that the Group continue its work during the present session. The delegation of Mexico joined in that consensus, and it is now offering to participate actively in the discussion of this important subject when the Working Group meets again in 1998.

Throughout our deliberations, Mexico's participation in the Working Group has been consistent with the position we have taken since the composition and decision-making methods of the Security Council were discussed in 1945 during the San Francisco Conference.

As the documents of the Conference which gave birth to our Organization attest, even then Mexico was not in favour of creating the category of permanent members of the Security Council. We believed then, and we continue to believe today, as was recalled by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico during the general debate at this session, that this division

> "establishes a discriminatory situation — a situation which is exacerbated by the permanent members having been given the right of the veto". [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 9th meeting, p. 24]

The political circumstances in 1945 compelled us to accept that in an Organization based on the principle of the sovereign equality of States, five of its Members would enjoy a higher status with special rights and prerogatives.

In line with this position of principle, by which we have stood since 1945, the Mexican delegation submitted in 1995 a specific proposal on the enlargement of the Security Council for consideration by the Working Group. That proposal, which is being circulated in this Hall today, provides for an increase of five members, all of them in the non-permanent category. I wish to reaffirm here that our suggestion remains on the table awaiting substantive consideration.

We have been asked why we continue to insist that the increase in the composition of the Council should be confined solely and exclusively to the category of non-permanent members. The reasons we gave at the time we submitted our proposal remain valid. We are convinced that the Council needs to be enlarged to reflect the current composition of the Organization and, at the same time, to ensure that it is an organ that acts efficiently and effectively while being more transparent and, above all, more democratic.

We know that there are a number of countries, led by the so-called pretenders, that argue that the best way of reflecting the present world situation as this century draws to a close can only be through an increase in the number of permanent members of the Security Council. The reason, we are told without further justification, will confer greater legitimacy on its decisions. Nevertheless, they have not been able and, indeed, are not able to explain why a Council with 10 permanent members would be more efficient. They do not tell us why a Security Council with 10 permanent members would be more effective. Nor are they able to explain why a Security Council with 10 permanent members would act more transparently than it does at present. And they are of course unable to convince us — because there are no arguments to support their case — that a Security Council with twice the number of States holding the immense power and privileges enjoyed by permanent members would be more democratic.

If we limit ourselves to the best-known possibility and conduct an analysis of the configuration of the Security Council with the so-called pretenders included, the result would be to undermine the principles enshrined in the Charter, which we all maintain to be of special importance, such as those establishing the sovereign equality of States, equity and geographical distribution.

If the so-called pretenders were to realize their dream of becoming new permanent members, we would then have a Security Council in which the European Union, made up of 15 States, would have three permanent members. It must not be forgotten that the European Union, which undoubtedly represents a new factor in international relations, aspires not only to a single currency but also to the establishment of a common foreign and defence policy. Of course, we wish the European countries every success in achieving the goal of integration they have set for themselves. What cannot be explained is why, in the same context, they feel the need to have, not one, not two, but three permanent members.

Since 1991 we have been teaching our children that the cold war is over. We welcome that fact, but we wonder why the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, a

military alliance now made up of 16 countries that was established in the context of bipolar confrontation, wants to have four permanent members.

A still more illogical projection is what would happen to the group of States known as the Group of Eight. This handful of countries would have six permanent members. Six of its eight members would belong to the privileged category. In this scenario, we would have a Security Council in which the privileged group would be predominantly European and, obviously, developed. Is that genuine geographical balance? Whatever happened to the principle of equity and representativeness? It is totally ignored in this new composition.

Finally, I wish to reiterate emphatically that for Mexico it is unacceptable that, as we approach the end of the century, an attempt should be made to increase the number of States enjoying the privilege of the enormous power that the Charter confers on the permanent members of the Security Council.

We do not believe there is any justification whatsoever for establishing new power centres in our Organization. We have said so before, and we repeat it now. We are convinced that the five States to which the Charter assigned special status — by a majority decision, not a unanimous one, in San Francisco — are more than enough.

If we really want to make progress on resolving this issue, we shall have to devise equitable and non-discriminatory mechanisms that are acceptable to all. We again urge the pretenders to give up their ambitions and act in accordance with the spirit of democracy and equity that should be the lifeblood of international relations at the end of the century.

I should like now to refer briefly to the most obvious exceptional power conferred by the Charter on the permanent members of the Security Council. This is, of course, what in legal terms is called the rule of unanimity of the permanent members, and is generally known as the privilege of the veto.

We have learned to live with the injustice of a provision that we had to accept in San Francisco and that we were assured would maintain unity among the victors of the Second World War. In fact, however, the veto did not serve this purpose. The rivalry between the Powers was apparent from the very inception of our Organization, and for many years their antagonism even prevented the admission of new members to the United Nations. More than 20 States, victims of a confrontation that had nothing to do with them, had their entry unnecessarily postponed. It may be noted, as an interesting footnote, that among them are the main pretenders to a higher category and to the privilege that did them so much harm in the past.

In San Francisco, Mexico was opposed to the granting of the veto. In a one-sided struggle, the appetites and ambitions of the Powers won out over the voices of reason and equity. Subsequently, Mexico consistently opposed the indiscriminate utilization of that prerogative, the abuse of which, as my country's Minister for Foreign Affairs pointed out in the general debate, many times prevented the Council from performing its most essential work.

In San Francisco, Mexico supported Australia's proposal that the scope of the veto should be confined to measures undertaken on the basis of Chapter VII of the Charter. At that time the winners of the Second World War also frustrated that attempt to moderate the exercise of the veto power. Now, half a century later, we urge them to reconsider that attitude. Unilateralism must give way to and make room for the collective aspirations to equality and democracy.

The process of enlarging the Security Council has its own rhythm. A solution cannot be rushed. The Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and, at the Latin American level, the Rio Group have all spoken out at the highest level in favour of giving time for reflection, so as to arrive at the "general agreement" referred to in the General Assembly resolution that established the Working Group. Echoing the voice of the vast majority, Mexico's Minister for Foreign Affairs stated in the general debate:

> "The issue is too important to be dealt with hastily." [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 9th meeting, p. 25]

We reaffirm our conviction that the reform of the Security Council should be a project that unites us, not an issue that divides us. It is not a question of a source of national prestige, nor of a way of strengthening regional hegemony. Rather than special agendas, what should guide our efforts is the interest of the United Nations. We need a reform that will promote unity of leadership and purpose in the Organization and not weaken the

factors that give stability and cohesion to matters of general interest.

Let us work to build an efficient, effective, transparent and democratic Security Council that reflects the interests of all regions without discrimination, without special statuses or exclusive pr. ileges. Only in this way will the objective of adapting the Council to present circumstances be attained. Only in this way will its decisions have legitimacy and representativeness.

In the search for a Security Council of that kind, the Working Group can count on the active and resolute participation of Mexico.

Mr. Sucharipa (Austria): The fact that so many delegations can muster the energy to speak once again on this item, on the issue of Security Council reform, constitutes undeniable proof of our collective resolve to advance the issue in spite of the considerable conceptual gaps that still exist between various positions. What unites all Member States is a broad feeling that expansion of the Council and revision of its working methods is urgently required in order to ensure for the future its representative character and legitimacy.

Like those of most other Member States, the Austrian position on Security Council reform has been expressed in detail over the last four years. Our views have been incorporated in a working document that we submitted together with Belgium and a number of other Member States. That paper is reproduced in document A/49/965.

We believe that expansion should occur in both categories — permanent and non-permanent — and that the balance in the composition of the Council between permanent and non-permanent membership should be maintained within an overall number not exceeding 25. The representative character of the Council depends not only on the number of permanent members but also on the specific contributions non-permanent members have consistently made over the years to the work of the Council. New ideas and new approaches have again and again been initiated by non-permanent members, and more often than not, these members have also made valuable efforts to maintain the necessary liaison with the vast majority of United Nations Members not serving on the Council.

Expansion of membership in both categories will have to ensure a better representation of developing countries. Thus, while we support the interest of Japan and Germany in serving as permanent members, we equally support parallel interests from qualified countries of the South. Expansion in the non-permanent category will, by and large, have to follow recognized principles of geographic distribution.

We advocate a curtailment of the veto power, ideally limiting it to actions under Chapter VII, and do not wish to see more prominence being given to this instrument through the expansion of the category of permanent membership.

We strongly support efforts to further increase transparency in the working methods of the Council and enhanced possibilities for non-member States to have their views heard.

Finally, we believe that a periodic review of the composition of the Council would also help maintain its representative character for the future. Such a review should examine whether potential future changes in international relations should and could be reflected through further structural changes in the composition of the membership.

It must be obvious to everybody following this debate that more efforts will be needed to construct bridges between various national and group positions. While we maintain the view that our position, as outlined, marks the middle ground and thus should help us in the search for a compromise, we realize that at this stage further innovative thinking might be needed. In this context, let me pay special tribute to President Razali for his valuable contribution to this process. Likewise, let me thank the two Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group for their relentless efforts. The fact that today we have not yet arrived at agreement on Security Council reform is certainly not due to any lack of energy or devotion to this issue on their part.

I assume that we all want to move forward towards constructing an expanded Security Council with strengthened capacity and effectiveness, enhanced representative character and improved working efficiency. After all, this appears as the major conclusion in the report of the Working Group.

In order to do so, I believe we should ponder a number of questions which, even after four years of intensive discussions, would profit from further clarification and subsequent negotiations. I should like to mention three of these issues: overall size of the Council,

decision-making process and rotating permanent membership.

With regard to size, we need to arrive at an understanding on the acceptable outer limits of expansion. This number will have to go beyond the conservative attitudes expressed by some of the current permanent members if we want to generate sufficient support for an expansion model. At the same time, the number will have to stay below certain maximum figures if we want — as we must, by virtue of Article 108 of the Charter — to positively engage all the permanent members in the ratification process.

With regard to the decision-making process, the most difficult compromises are yet to be found. We would suggest that a combination of measures to reduce the veto power of current permanent members and an appropriate definition of the action threshold in a newly constituted enlarged Council might be a road worthy of further exploration.

Finally, on rotating permanent membership, I do not wish to hide the fact that my delegation still has certain difficulties with this concept, as do others. However, should this be the key to the magic solution we seem to be looking for, I believe the concept would and could then gain sufficient support; but for that to happen further explanations will be necessary.

Under Article 24, paragraph 1, of the Charter, the Members of the United Nations confer upon the Security Council the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and agree that in the discharge of this duty the Council acts on their behalf. What can be done to reconcile this concept with systems of regional rotation? In the most likely case — that future permanent members will not enjoy veto powers — can one envisage permanent members without the two main characteristics of permanent membership? If so, what can be done to minimize this obvious inconsistency?

I have tried to pinpoint some of the more important issues that, in our view, still need further elaboration. Other delegations have referred to similar or other issues. I believe that this should not disappoint or discourage us. It should not come as a surprise that a major undertaking of this kind needs sustained efforts by all interested delegations.

After four years of fairly intensive debate, my delegation remains interested in seeing a swift result of our deliberations. Discussions until now have resulted in the widely held view that the current composition of the Council is no longer representative and that the Council therefore lacks legitimacy. This situation is unhealthy. It needs to be redressed. Hence, our interest in seeing reform of the Council brought about as soon as feasible.

Mr. Sharma (India): As the reform session of the General Assembly begins its consideration of a cardinal aspect of the reform of the United Nations, I would like to pay tribute, Mr. President, to the sagacity with which you have ventured to clear the atmosphere that seemed to have clouded consideration of the item pertaining to the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters.

We welcome your reappointment of the Bureau of the Open-ended Working Group and your decision to have it resume its work early next year. It is reassuring that we shall continue to benefit from the guidance and diligence of Ambassador Breitenstein and Ambassador Jayanama when the Group tries once more to bring its mandate to fruition.

My delegation associates itself with the statement to be made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The imperatives of reform of the Security Council are well recognized. The challenge that faces us now is to translate the identifiable consensus that exists in favour of Security Council reform to a general agreement on the nature and modalities of the reform exercise. Expansion of the membership, improvement of the working methods and changes in decision-making procedures have been widely identified as essential ingredients of the comprehensive package of reform.

We unanimously agreed at the last session that we should continue building on the work done during previous sessions. It is therefore incumbent on us to continue the process of developing a widely shared perspective during the current session in a sustained and objective manner. Such an exercise will carry weight by being transparent, participative and devoid of suspicion and distrust.

India's position on the variety of issues related to this subject reflects our willingness to proceed in an objective manner. On the issue of expansion, we have held that it is an objective reality that the ratio of the Security Council membership to the General Assembly

membership has declined from 1 to 4.6 at the time of the adoption of the United Nations Charter, to 1 to 12.33 today. The ratio of permanent Security Council members to the General Assembly membership has declined from 1 to 10 in 1945 to 1 to 37 now. The present permanent members of the Council have a combined population of about 1.8 billion. This leaves two thirds of the world's population without representation in the permanent category in an Organization whose Charter was framed in the name of "the peoples of the United Nations".

Mr. Abu-Nimah (Jordan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Imbalance in the permanent membership of the Security Council arises not only from the exclusion of an overwhelming section of the world population, but also from the disproportionately high representation of a particular group of countries. This situation needs to be alleviated rather than accentuated. Developing countries need to be represented equitably in the permanent category. The Prime Minister of India, in his address before the current session of the General Assembly, emphasizing this need, stated:

> "In this way the decisions of the Council will truly reflect the wider membership of the United Nations. Otherwise, the Council's actions will be seen as progressively less representative at a time when it is being called upon to act far more frequently than before on behalf of the world community". [See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Plenary Meetings*, 9th meeting]

This need is all the more pressing in the era of globalization that is upon us, when the affairs of the world are being woven together more closely than ever before.

The expansion of the Security Council must equip it to face the challenges of the next millennium. An inclusive approach would strengthen it. Any attempt to exclude developing countries from the highest echelon of the Council's membership would weaken its credibility and support for its actions.

To us, as to a vast majority, the requirement of an expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent categories is self-evident. The creation of intermediate subsidiary categories will not address the central issue of correcting the imbalance within the permanent category of the Council itself, which is what we are mandated to rectify. It will perpetuate the imbalance, the recognition of which is the starting point of this reform exercise, rather than redress it.

India has always held that a normative approach, which brings coherence to the debate, should guide the exercise of reform of the Security Council. The aim is to achieve a broad-based rather than a piecemeal expansion. This can be encouraged if criteria are discussed so that a uniform perspective informs the appreciation of what is involved in expanded permanent membership. Elements relevant here would be the share of humanity represented by a country; geographical spread; size and potential of the economy; contributions within the United Nations system as a whole, and particularly to peacekeeping; an independent and constructive engagement in world affairs; and, to meet the challenges of the approaching millennium, the evolving potential of a State. During the general debate, other Member States also emphasized the need to orient the exchanges before us towards a consideration of criteria. Perhaps it would be useful to pursue this path further when the Working Group resumes next year. It would ensure a non-discriminatory approach and develop a uniform perspective, principles to which we have committed ourselves.

The General Assembly is the most representative organ of the United Nations. This indeed is the forum where the choice of any new permanent members should be made without any precondition or any predetermination. Resolution 48/26 called for an expansion of the Security Council to be based on general agreement. This was affirmed by the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, held at New Delhi last April, as well as by the recent meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement held in New York in September. The idea of consensus at a regional or group level cannot therefore be relevant.

Reform of the Security Council is not only a matter of evolution in its composition and size but also an opportunity for reviewing its working methods so as to provide for enhanced transparency, greater accountability to the general membership of the United Nations through a more purposeful relationship with the General Assembly, and a new understanding of its decision-making procedures. The Non-Aligned Movement has provided constructive suggestions on the entire array of issues under this rubric. There has been substantial convergence of views on a variety of measures. We hope that the forthcoming discussions in the Working Group

will also lead to further progress on how to proceed with the institutionalizing of agreed measures.

Non-discrimination is an ideal that has imbued our approach on all aspects of Security Council reform. Any new understanding of decision-making procedures and veto needs to be in conformity with this guiding principle.

Finally, any package that we arrive at would, of necessity, be subject to an appropriate review, not because it is the first step in a long-drawn process, but because constructive adaptation to change is essential to preserve the effectiveness of any organization, particularly one representative of the entire world community.

There is a clear and categorical national consensus in India, cutting across the entire political spectrum, that India could appropriately shoulder the responsibilities of permanent membership in an expanded United Nations Security Council. India's position on this was declared initially in 1994 and reiterated recently by Prime Minister Shri Inder Kumar Gujral in his address to the General Assembly plenary. The Prime Minister reaffirmed that India is prepared to bear in full the responsibilities of permanent membership.

Permanent members are expected to bring with them a global vision and global responsibilities. From the earliest days of the United Nations, India has been instrumental in placing on its agenda issues on which it has had the most success, including decolonization, apartheid and human rights. Permanent members have a special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. India has shown a constant commitment to this objective since independence. Since the creation of the United Nations, India has been a leading contributor to United Nations peacekeeping operations, including in the most complex operations in Korea, the Congo and Somalia.

This year we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence. We have come a long way since 1947. For the past five decades, we have developed progressively effective national capabilities and self-reliance over a wide range of sectors, particularly in the national economy, diverse areas of advanced science and technology, and human-resource development. All this and much more has been achieved within the framework of a transparent and vibrant democracy. Our endeavour is to contribute to the overall international effort towards economic development, peace and stability.

Over the past five decades, India has been committed to forcefully articulating the concerns, priorities and perspectives of the developing world with reason, balance and a constructive orientation.

It is true that the process of reform of the Security Council has been under way for four years. However, the effort expended on this necessary venture has not been without success. We feel that some progress has been made, and we should continue assiduously to advance it. India will continue to be engaged actively and constructively in this endeavour.

Mr. Mesdoua (Algeria) (*interpretation from French*): Let me begin with sincere congratulations to Ambassador Breitenstein of Finland and Ambassador Jayanama of Thailand on their reappointment as co-Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council. By renewing its expression of confidence in them, the General Assembly has put on record its recognition of their tireless efforts in the service of the Group and, above all, for their patience.

Our debate on Security Council reform is taking place in a context marked in particular by the ongoing discussion of the Secretary-General's reform proposals. Here the General Assembly recently adopted a major resolution on a series of measures, and is about to pronounce itself on institutional reforms intended to chart a course for the modernization of the United Nations so that it will be better prepared to meet present and future challenges. However worthwhile and important it is, this effort will remain incomplete unless it is complemented by more substantial reform with the ultimate purpose of rewriting obsolete provisions of the Charter and modernizing institutions and relationships within the Organization that still reflect the logic and concerns of the world as it looked at the end of the Second World War.

Because it is at the centre of our system of collective security, and because it is the place for the expression of and, sometimes, for clashes between the interests and stakes of the powerful, the Security Council represents — along with reform of the Council — a test of our collective readiness to establish more democratic and more representative institutions and to build international relations that bear the stamp of justice and solidarity.

Since the General Assembly decided four years ago to debate this item in plenary meeting, delegations have traditionally sought in their statements to take stock of the results of the waning session and to look to the prospects for the future. The temptation to do this is all the greater today, because the present session has been especially eventful. It will be remembered as the session that most clearly demonstrated our inability to find a compromise satisfactory to all. It will be remembered also as the one that brought our frustrations into clearest focus.

We must acknowledge that no progress has been made on substantive issues. Whether on the size of the Council, its composition, the procedures for selecting new permanent members, or even more so the question of the veto, to name but a few, the gap between positions has grown deeper and wider, rather than narrowing thanks to desirable compromise. In part, this is because of the sensitive and complex nature of this exercise, and because of our ambitious effort to achieve genuine, across-the-board reform of the Council. Along with many others, my delegation has always favoured reform that would not be limited to a mere facelift or to a simple arithmetic process, like that which took place in 1965 — in this case increasing the number of seats on the Council from 15 to 24.

With this in mind, my delegation has encouraged the Working Group to show imagination and to reflect seriously on innovative ideas. Here I note with great regret that the idea of rotating permanent seats, recommended by the African Group and endorsed by the Harare summit, has not been adequately explored. It is a viable approach which — contrary to what its detractors, who would confine it to a specific geographical arena, say — could respond to our wish for more equitable representation in the Council.

The lack of tangible progress on decisive questions relating to the enlargement of the Council should not make us forget the major achievements made on the second group of matters, relating to the working methods of the Security Council, which in our view are no less important. On these, the Working Group had very constructive and fruitful discussions, including on substantive matters such as the institutionalization of measures the Council itself has taken to increase transparency in its work and of additional measures suggested for the most part by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Moreover, it is undeniable that improvements in the Council's working methods and procedures have been the result of the pressure and positive influence that debate and discussion in the Working Group brought to bear on Council members. It is therefore important for this dynamic to continue in order to solidify and, above all, to consolidate these achievements.

The Working Group is ready to resume its work at the fifty-second session in a climate marked by growing impatience and frustration. It is clear that such a climate does not favour the dialogue that is necessary for a compromise that can win support from the broadest possible majority. We must therefore work to restore the conditions for open, calm debate, and must avoid any action that could further impair the climate or trigger useless and harmful divisions. In that connection, my delegation welcomes the fact that reason and a wish for the general interest to prevail have very recently carried the day over confrontation.

We must make it clear that the principles that should guide our discussions, as forcefully outlined by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by the Organization of African Unity, include rejecting the imposition of a deadline on the work of the Group while recognizing the need to arrive speedily at a satisfactory solution on the basis of general agreement. Because of the stakes and scope of this exercise and its impact on the future of the United Nations, we must act prudently and realistically, and must ensure that we act in the context of a genuine process of renewal and modernization of the Security Council, to which we all aspire.

Above and beyond the strict respect for the provisions of the Charter that is imperative in all circumstances and for all States — especially when it comes to amending the Charter — it is important today to ensure the cooperation and support of the greatest possible number of Member States, so as to secure the full meaning and breadth of Article 24 of the Charter.

Mr. Fulci (Italy): Five years have elapsed since the General Assembly asked the Secretary-General to launch the exercise on Security Council reform by submitting a questionnaire to all Member States. Almost four years to the day have gone by since the General Assembly established the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council. Yet today, as I speak, a solution still appears as elusive as ever. Positions remain far apart, very far apart.

The Working Group has spent the last nine months on the so-called Razali framework resolution, named after the former President of the General Assembly who fought a personal campaign to promote it. The core of

his latest proposal is that two new permanent seats be given to industrialized countries and three to the developing nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. This puts the three regions between two alternatives: the improbability of one country from each continent being selected, and the likelihood of permanent rotating seats. In other words, the "quick fix", which the "great pretenders" say they don't want but re-propose by deed if not by word.

Nobody has yet been able to explain to me the difference between permanent rotating seats without the veto power and regular non-permanent seats. In substance, the Razali proposal would grant two real permanent seats, with full rights and privileges, even if without the veto yet, to industrialized countries, in exchange for three pseudo-permanent seats to the nations of the South. I ask: how can anyone imagine that developing countries would accept such an exchange, perpetuating — no, aggravating — the present situation?

Currently all five permanent members are from the world's northern hemisphere and are industrialized, or on the verge of becoming so. Under the Razali system, that number would grow from five to seven, with no real, true permanent seats going to the southern hemisphere. As the President of the Italian Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, said in this Hall in April of last year:

> "An Olympus of powerful countries could widen the gap and thus reduce the interest of the excluded, demeaning their political commitment in the process and perhaps marginalizing them and giving them the dangerous feeling that they are token presences, mere spectators of the decision taken by others." [See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Plenary Meetings*, 103rd meeting]

The very idea of permanent seats is rooted in international realities which prevailed at the end of the Second World War. As our Mexican colleague, Ambassador Manuel Tello, reminded us this morning, even then the idea did not seem to enjoy vast popularity.

When the United Nations Charter was drafted in San Francisco, only 30 of the 51 original members — that is, barely more than half — voted in favour of establishing permanent members of the Security Council, who could block forever, in perpetuity, any challenge to their status through the veto. While the winners of the Second World War may have succeeded in imposing such a solution back then, it does not mean they can do it again today.

In the last half century, the world has changed, and changed profoundly. Back in 1945, the great majority of countries present in this Hall today were still colonies. Now they are all sovereign, fully independent nations. And like all Member States, they treasure their sovereignty, perhaps more than anyone else. The new nations are certainly in no mood to submit to the virtual hegemony of another country, no matter how big, on their own continents. No one is ready to dilute his sovereignty in any way, fashion or style. As our colleague from Spain, Ambassador Inocencio Arias, is fond of saying: "No one really wants to act like Esau, who sold his birthright for a plate of lentils".

From the beginning, we Italians have maintained that the Razali proposal was inadequate. The same applies to the offspring of that proposal, announced by the United States in July. Both the Razali proposal and its American offspring would leave us with three categories of permanent members: permanent members with the veto, permanent members without the veto and pseudo-permanent members from developing countries — and, of course, the non-permanent members become relegated to a fourth-class category. Some of you may recall the immediate reaction in the Working Group, when this formula was announced, of the former Ambassador of India, Prakash Shah, who said: "If the developing countries rotate, so must the industrialized nations". And if I may remind you all, the principle of universal rotation is the main-stay, the very basis, of the Italian proposal for reform of the Security Council.

The Ambassador of Egypt, Nabil Elaraby, underlined last year that rotation solutions:

> "would give a larger number of countries in all regions the opportunity to assume, in turn, the responsibility of Security Council membership, thereby strengthening its role and credibility".

The pretenders to new permanent seats have claimed that a solution is "tantalizingly close". I fail to be tantalized. The truth is that on the basis of the informal, confidential consultations conducted by the co-Vice-Chairmen with Member States at the beginning of this year, the faulty assumption arose that everyone in this room was ready to accept new permanent seats of any kind.

What I believe happened is as follows: in the darkness of the confessional box, Member States were asked, "Do you want an increase in permanent seats?"

The answer, of course, was "Yes". How could it have been otherwise, since, for instance, 52 Heads of State or Government of the African countries have already agreed that they want two permanent seats, with the veto, for their continent. But if the Permanent Representatives of those 52 African countries had been asked whether they would be willing to accept only one pseudo-permanent seat, without the veto, I am sure the response would have been a resounding "No".

The time has come to seal the confessional box and consider only the positions that have been expressed in the light of day and for all to see in the Open-ended Working Group — the one and only place where Member States can make their positions clearly known to the Chairman and to each other on this crucial issue.

My delegation, the delegation of Italy, has been accused of favouring the status quo. This is simply not true. Our only aim has been, and remains, to firmly oppose unfair and discriminatory proposals. This was best put by my friend Ambassador Kamal of Pakistan, who last year said,

> "any increase in the permanent membership would serve the interests of only a few countries and would be to the detriment of small and medium-sized countries, which constitute the overwhelming majority of the membership of the United Nations." [*Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Plenary Meetings*, 49th meeting, p. 2]

We continue to strongly believe that Security Council reform is long overdue. This is why we have presented our own proposal, modified it in response to helpful suggestions and kept it on the table. As the Assembly knows, it has received statements of support or interest from a good 81 countries. We know that this support is not sufficient, since it falls short of the 124 votes that we firmly believe are needed for approval of any Security Council expansion. But maybe now the wind has changed, since it has become widely recognized that if the developing countries are forced to rotate, industrialized countries must also rotate. So perhaps the Italian proposal could come on stage again.

As the Foreign Minister of Italy, Mr. Lamberto Dini, said in his addresses to the General Assembly, Italy is willing to examine and support other formulas that are not incompatible with the principles upon which our own is based: democracy, real equitable geographic representation, effectiveness, efficiency and transparency. Another possibility, of course, is the fall-back position of the Non-Aligned Movement, which calls for an increase, for the time being, only in the non-permanent seats in the event that no agreement can be reached on the other categories of membership.

This leads me to our reasons for joining 21 other sponsors in presenting draft resolution A/52/L.7, which, I would once again like to underline, is of a procedural nature. Some have said that we are sending the wrong message and are pushing an aggressive approach. The exact opposite is true. As a very distinguished colleague noted, ours was simply a measure of "preventive diplomacy". It addresses three basic issues: first, the need to avoid any imposed time-frame until general agreement has been reached; secondly, the quorum required to pass any enlargement of the Security Council; and thirdly, the need to continue discussion of the question in the Open-ended Working Group, to give all Member States the chance to fully participate.

Let me elaborate briefly on these three points. With regard to the first one, we have been called by some the "inertia group". In reality, we have always maintained that reform is a matter of urgent attention, but not at the cost of sacrificing general agreement. After we submitted draft resolution A/52/L.7, Italy was asked to withdraw its support, sometimes in rather robust terms, as were others among the 22 sponsors. We resisted this suggestion. To prove our point, we insisted to the President of the General Assembly that the Working Group be reconvened in the second half of January, at the latest. The other side sought to postpone discussion until as late as March or even April, and even to cancel today's debate — a debate which, I am sure, will prove how deeply divided the membership still is on the issue. We needed only to listen to those who spoke before me to realize how true this is.

The second point, the necessary quorum to approve any reform or expansion, is by far the most important of the three issues. Again and again, every side has repeatedly argued that we need general agreement. But what kind of threshold is meant by "general agreement"? Certainly not less than two thirds of the Member States. Nobody, but nobody, I believe, could argue that such a number could be no lower than 124 votes, the same number prescribed by Article 108 for resolutions amending the Charter.

Frankly, I believe that our procedural draft resolution has a great merit: it has revealed the true intentions of the great pretenders and some of their

supporters. They now say they would adopt the Razali-framework draft resolution by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting — not by 124 votes, but by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting. It is common knowledge that whenever sensitive or very controversial issues are voted on here at the United Nations, more than a few countries act like Pontius Pilate: they wash their hands of the matter. They just abstain or happen not to be present at the crucial time. We checked, and we found that in the last couple of years, for example, at the moment of the vote on controversial draft resolutions, sometimes 40 or 50 delegations were not present. Moreover, a dozen or so Member States are not allowed to vote in the General Assembly, either for well-known reasons or because they have not paid their dues. In other words — and I want to draw attention to this because I think it is a crucial point — a reform of such relevance, of such magnitude as Security Council expansion could be approved by as few as 70, 80 or 90 votes, representing less than half the membership of the United Nations. This is what our opponents are asking. This is frankly unbelievable. It is unthinkable.

Turning to my third point, there can be little doubt that the only place where efforts can be made to bridge the sea of differences still existing on the issue of Security Council reform is within the Open-ended Working Group, in the light of day and for all to see. There, the Razali formula, with all its negative implications and consequences, can finally be put to rest once and for all. Two other major options should then be revisited and fully analysed in the Working Group, namely, rotation and/or increase only in non-permanent seats along the lines of the fall-back position of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Throughout the exercise of Security Council reform, my delegation has been guided by three main motivations: first, that of protecting my country's interests. Let us set the record straight. Everyone in this Hall promotes and is called on to promote his or her own national interests. I said last year, and I repeat now, that Italy, the fifth-largest producer of wealth in the world and soon to become the fifth-largest contributor to the United Nations regular budget, will never, never accept relegation to third- or fourth-class status.

Our second motivation is that of protecting a dream. Like many other Europeans, we Italians hope that in the not-too-distant future there can be a common European seat on the Security Council. Increasing the number of permanent members on the Council from the countries of the European Union would deal a setback to that dream rather than move it closer to reality.

Last but not least, we are motivated by the desire to protect the interests of the United Nations as a whole. Article 25 of the Charter provides that

> "The Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council".

Such an enormous and extraordinary delegation of power can be upheld only through trust and a system of accountability. The one true test of accountability in a democratic system is regular elections. The creation of new permanent members would exempt certain countries from the test of regular elections and therefore further erode the supremacy of the General Assembly. We must not allow this to happen. For, in the end, the General Assembly is and must remain the cornerstone of our Organization.

To conclude, as Foreign Minister Dini wrote yesterday in an article published simultaneously in *The International Herald Tribune*, the *General Anzeiger*, and *Corriere della Sera*:

> "Any reform, if it is to pass the scrutiny of national parliaments and public opinion, must produce real progress in terms of the credibility, democracy and authority of the most universal of world institutions." [International Herald Tribune, Editorial/Opinion pages, 3 December 1997]

In other words, it must reflect a Security Council of the future, not the Security Council of the past.

Mr. Park (Republic of Korea): The reform of the Security Council is an issue of vital importance which has far-reaching implications not only for the future of the Organization itself but for the health of international relations in the twenty-first century as well. Although four years of deliberations in the Open-ended Working Group have not yet led to general agreement on any specific formula for reform, they have identified the key issues of contention and enabled us to discern what lies at the heart of the divergence of views among Member States.

We all agree that the changes in international relations over the past several decades are of a nature that warrants expansion of Council membership.

Divergent views exist on the issue of how these changes can best be reflected in alterations of the composition of the Council and how a mechanism can be devised to ensure that the composition remains in line with future changes in international relations. We believe that this divergence of views can be resolved if the reform of the Council is based on an objective analysis of the problems and shortcomings of the Council's operations thus far.

The last half century has witnessed the emergence of a considerable number of nations endowed with significant power resources with which to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. We believe that the Security Council should be reformed in a way which ensures that these nations can serve in the Council with reasonable frequency, commensurate with their capabilities to contribute to international peace and security. In our view, this can best be done through an increase in the non-permanent category of Council membership alone, by providing for a mechanism under which those countries with distinguished capabilities to contribute to international security can be elected to Council membership with greater frequency or longer tenure than others.

The idea of creating five new permanent seats, two from the industrialized world and three from the developing world, has been afloat for some time now. Over the past five decades some Member States have come to acquire power resources which are comparable to those held by some of the current permanent members. We fully understand the aspirations of some of these countries to permanent membership. However, we are concerned that an increase in permanent membership might actually create more problems than it solves.

Let me for the sake of clarity elaborate further on some of the problems we should expect to arise.

First of all, there seems to be no clear way to determine which countries are qualified for permanent membership and which are not. If any proposed expansion of permanent seats takes place, there are certain to be many other Member States that are not fortunate enough to be elected to new permanent membership but that are just as qualified in terms of power resources as those that do. This means that, in the name of eliminating the existing discrimination between current permanent members and aspirants to new permanent membership, we would actually end up creating an even worse system of discrimination that affects a greater number of countries. Those countries would feel marginalized and alienated as third-class Member States, and might well lose their incentive to make constructive contributions to the work of our Organization. Given the capability and willingness of these nations to make a meaningful contribution to international peace and security, this would be a setback to the health and vitality of the United Nations.

In the light of what takes place in the Security Council in terms of realpolitik, we are concerned that an increase in permanent membership could further enhance the possibility of excluding the real issues affecting international peace and security from the purview of the Security Council. It would also undermine the efficiency of the Council in responding to conflict situations in a timely manner, because more time would be spent on working out differences among a large number of permanent members.

The virtual irreplaceability of permanent members, once they are elected, is yet another serious problem associated with the increase in permanent membership. If a one-time decision were to hold sway for all time, Member States would be forced to live for ever with the results of one fateful decision based on the international political realities at a fixed point in time, regardless of the dynamic evolution of international relations that might unfold in the future. The dynamics of international relations are such that in the future there could be other countries which catch up with or surpass the power resources of permanent members. A system of periodic review cannot properly address the problem of the growing gap between the composition of the Council and underlying international realities because new permanent members would be able to perpetuate their privileged status with the support of a mere one third of the general membership.

Apart from these problems, an increase in the ratio of Council members not regularly elected by — and thus not accountable to — the general membership would undermine the political legitimacy and credibility of the Council to act on behalf of the general membership. This is certainly not consistent with the vision which my Government holds for the Security Council in the twenty-first century.

Bearing these problems in mind, we strongly hope that common ground can be found which will enable us to transform the Security Council into a more representative, effective, efficient and democratic body. We will work closely with other interested Member States to work out a solution acceptable to the entire

membership. We will remain open-minded and flexible with regard to any constructive proposals which can move this important process in the right direction.

My delegation would like to say a word on the current under-representation of the Asian Group in the Security Council. As it stands, without counting permanent members, the Asian Group of 48 countries holds the same number of non-permanent seats as the 33-member Group of Latin American and Caribbean States and the 24-country Group of Western European and other States. The Asian Group is the only regional group which has expanded in both membership and geographical coverage since the end of the cold war. Given the number of countries and other relevant factors, the Asian Group deserves at least as many non-permanent seats as the African Group in an expanded Council. Any formula that fails to address this problem will be neither fair nor just for the Asian Group.

Finally, as a sponsor of draft resolution A/52/L.7, we reaffirm our opposition to any imposed artificial time-frame for deliberations on this important issue and to any attempt to adopt in the General Assembly substantive decisions by less than a two-thirds majority of the entire membership.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon at 3 p.m.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.